



# CAPOEIRA

THE HISTORY OF AN AFRO-BRAZILIAN MARTIAL ART



MATTHIAS RÖHRIG ASSUNÇÃO

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# Capoeira

First documented among African and Creole slaves in late colonial Brazil, the martial art capoeira spread, despite periodic clampdowns by the police, to the free underclasses of Brazilian cities throughout the nineteenth century. Capoeira is now a mainstream sport, taught in Brazilian fitness centres, schools and universities, and practised by a range of people of different age, class, gender and ethnicity around the world. Some practitioners now even seek Olympic recognition for capoeira.

The change in meaning and purposes of capoeira has led to conflicts between traditionalists, for whom capoeira is part of an African cultural heritage, and reformers, who wish to see capoeira develop as an international sport. There is consensus, however, that capoeira is a weapon to be used against social injustice and racial exclusion.

*Capoeira: The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art* explores capoeira as a field of confrontation where different struggles that divide Brazilian society are played out. It contains a first English language scholarly account of capoeira's early history and development to the present day.

**Matthias Röhrig Assunção** is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of History and the Centre for Latin American Studies, University of Essex, England. His previous publications deal with slavery in Maranhão (Northern Brazil), popular culture and the political history of the Brazilian Empire.

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The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art

**Matthias Röhrig Assunção**

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## Series editor's foreword

It was the ambition of the compilers of a recent general study of martial arts to record change over time. The reason: '...some (martial arts) remained martial in nature; others metamorphosed into sport, performance art, or discipline for self fulfilment.'<sup>1</sup> 'Thus it was important to present martial arts not as carvings in stone but as reflection but as reflections in mirrors.'<sup>2</sup> A praiseworthy ambition. Assunção achieves it more impressively. The same compilers added that they covered Asians who adapted Western combative sports and Westerners who turned simultaneously to Asian martial disciplines: 'These descriptions coexist with armies using martial arts to teach self-actualization, movie stars advertised as the world's deadliest fighting men, and churches using martial arts to teach children not to fight. Such *contradictions* [emphasis added] are the nature of martial arts in the modern world.'<sup>3</sup> Assunção handles such contradictions superbly.

To paraphrase Assunção, *Capoeira: The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art* deals with the evolution of a martial arts tradition that has never been solidly uniform but over time has been fractured as a consequence of the changing and competing agendas of adherents, advocates and enthusiasts.<sup>4</sup> *Capoeira* does not shy away from consequent awkward complexities; it confronts tired clichés; it handles contradictions with subtlety. Consequently, it is impressively authoritative. It bears the kitemark of quality. It is set to be the subject's *locus classicus*.

After consideration of the assumptions underpinning the history of the phenomenon, *Capoeira* follows a well-marked chronological route from the very earliest to the most recent moments of a now increasingly popular pastime: from its roots in Black Atlantic and Afro-Brazilian culture, through hybridity and creolization, urbanization and controversial bifurcation in the 1930s, to its present blossoming as a fashionable form of physical exercise and cultural expression. Today it is a global fad with its own jargon, fanzines and websites. Googling for it (229,000 hits) reveals that it is catching up on Aikido (551,000 hits) and Judo (899,00 hits) but still well behind Karate (1.5million hits).<sup>5</sup>

In its original form in Brazil, capoeira was a form of confrontation of the politically strong by the politically weak—a system of physical defence used by the weaponless slave in response to Brazilian *Machtpolitik*. Assunção posits the view that the role of capoeira as a historical manifestation of resistance of the powerless against the powerful as part of its attraction for modern youth. He may well have underestimated its appeal. John Buchan wrote famously of causes which ennoble and those ennobled by them: 'No great cause is ever lost or ever won. The battle must always be renewed and the creed reinstated, and the old formulas, once so potent a revelation, become only dim antiquarian echoes. But some things are universal, catholic and undying...of which such formulas are the broken gleams. These do not age or pass out of fashion for they symbolise eternal things. They are the guardians of the freedom of the human spirit, the proof of what our mortal frailty can achieve.'<sup>6</sup>

If and when the possibly ephemeral fitness fashion has run its course, the spiritual essence of capoeira will remain, and Assunção will have played his part.

J.A.Mangan,  
Swanage,  
October 2004

## Acknowledgements

This book was written during the years 2001–3; collecting material started in 1994. My personal involvement with capoeira began in fact in 1980, when I was carrying out research for my PhD (on a completely different topic) in the archives of Rio de Janeiro and Maranhão. After sitting long hours in archives literally eating dust, I needed compensating activities. So I spent evenings learning *lelê* (a peasant dance of the Itapecuru valley) with the Grupo Pai Simão or learning capoeira in one of the beautiful colonial-style townhouses of the ‘city of tiles’. I thus am indebted to my first capoeira *mestre* (teacher, master), Sapo de Canjiquinha (Anselmo Barnabé Rodrigues), who came to São Luís from Bahia in the 1960s. He instructed hundreds of *capoeiristas* in Maranhão, and I also learned from him some basics of the art until his premature death in a fight, in 1982. When I returned to Europe, in 1983, capoeira was still almost unheard of. Only some years later did capoeira come to Berlin, but then the city quickly became a prime location for diffusion of the art in Europe. At first, only some isolated students of a faraway *mestre* made their way to Berlin, such as Tom Cuson (pupil of Bira Almeida, M.Acordeon). Then Brazilian teachers and *mestres* started to migrate to Europe. Capoeira schools opened in Paris, Amsterdam, Rome, Berlin and London. In Berlin, M.Gegê and instructor Saulo (from Grupo Iúna, Rio de Janeiro) were among the first Brazilians to teach their art to Berliners, and I owe them not only some instruction, but also the first regular *rodas* in the city, which re-connected me with capoeira and its groups.

Because of new professional commitments I started to live in England in 1993 and ‘commute’ to Bahia during the 1990s. During these years I often resumed training, but unfortunately many other commitments prevented me from training regularly. And worse, I did what all capoeira teachers strongly (and rightly so) recommend not to do. Because of various moves and frequent travels I had to change teachers or *mestres* several times. As expected, this was very bad for my capoeira (since every *mestre* teaches his own style, and changing means starting all over again). However, it also helped me to appreciate the difference of style and teaching methods of a range of *mestres*. I would like to thank them all for having tried to teach me something and not having despaired over my shortcomings, in particular M.(mestre) Ousado and M.Pastel in London. From 1994 onwards I also had the opportunity to spend some time learning capoeira Angola in Salvador, the holy city of capoeira, where I had the chance to take classes with M.Moraes, M.Valmir, CM. (contramestre) Poloca, CM.Boca do Rio, and CM.Paulinha.

The initial research for this book was carried out with a grant from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft —DFG, as part of a wider project on the Afro-American heritage during post-emancipation, carried out with Professor Reinhard Liehr (FU Berlin) and Professor Michael Zeuske (Köln). The project was funded through a special research area idealized by Professor Dietmar Rothermund (Heidelberg), a vigorous defender of ‘extra-European history’ within German academia. He stimulated the debate over ‘re-appropriation’ and ‘self-affirmation’ in Asia, Africa and Latin America and participating in the workshops and meetings of the Area ‘Cognitive Interaction in the European Expansion’ proved always inspiring.

To a large extent the writing-up of this book was only possible thanks to the systematic encouragement and the continuous support of what has been my home institution for the last 11 years. Despite growing pressure from above on resources and academic time and growing bureaucratic requirements, the University of Essex has managed to continue providing a stimulating research environment. The excellent infrastructure and the generous concessions of regular terms of study leave proved particularly helpful, as well as an additional term of leave granted by the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB). A research grant from the Fundação de Amparo a Pesquisa do Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ) allowed me to revise the manuscript. Working in the History Department at Essex has been a very rewarding experience for me. The systematic support and encouragement of successive heads of department and other colleagues have greatly contributed to me being able to complete this book. I would like to thank, in particular, all my colleagues who have read and commented on the outline, research grant or draft chapters of this book (even when it coincided with exam periods or other moments of pressure): Brian Hamnett, Jeremy Krikler, Steve Smith, and John Walter (History), Andrew Canessa, Paul Thompson (Sociology), Peter Hulme, Erna von der Walde (Literature), Gabriela Salgado (Latin American Art Collection—UECLAA). I am also grateful to academics from other institutions who commented on draft chapters, in particular Vivian Schelling (University of East London), Sylvia Chant (LSE), Kathianne Hingwan (Goldsmiths), and Sérgio Costa (FU Berlin). I also have to thank the *capoeiristas* who commented—and often very differently than my academic friends—on the same drafts: M.Luiz Renato Vieira, M.Gato, M.Cobra Mansa, and George Pintado.

I would also like to express my gratitude to M.Paulo Siqueira (Hamburg), M.Pastel (London), M.Cobra Mansa (Washington, DC), M.Rosalvo and CM.Susi (Berlin), Fantasma (London), and Leticia Vidor Reis (São Paulo) for inviting me to talk to capoeira adepts at events they organized during the years 2001–04. This has provided me with some very stimulating feedback, and taught me how seriously many practitioners take their art and how important it is to their life.

I am furthermore indebted to all the veteran *mestres* who have agreed to be interviewed, in particular the late Mestres Caiçara, Vavá and Ferreirinha, and furthermore M.Felipe Santiago, M.João Pequeno, M.Itapoan, M.Boca Rica, M.Diogo, M.Onça (Jair Moura), M. Gigante, M.João Grande, M.Brasília, M.Ousado, M.Moraes, M.Marco Aurélio, M.Russo, and M.Brasílio. M.Boca Rica merits special thanks for his kind support for my research. Many other capoeiristas have also been supportive in a number of ways and I would like to thank them here. In São Luís, M.Pato, M.Alberto Euzamor, CM.Marco-Aurélio, Nelsinho, Sami, and Mauro Abreu; in Salvador, M.Bamba, M.Nenel, M.Macumba, Angelo Decânio, M.Itapoan, Jair Moura, and Adriana ‘Pimenta’; in Rio de Janeiro, Lobisomem, M.Gato, M. Teco, CM Urubu and Daniel Granada da Silva Ferreira; in the US: Margaret Willson, Daniel Dawson, Sylvia Robinson (from FICA) in London: Christina, Zumbi, Goggi, Hassan, Pedreiro and Marguerite, Shemba, Fumaça (Mariano Almeida), Shona, Florence (Jurema), Alessandra, Cibêle and Índio Falador, Patrick, Helem Lara, Fantasma, Lia, Gill, Marcelo.

Although capoeira books are often difficult to find in libraries (even in places where one would expect a good collection) some institutions proved very useful for my research and their employees provided much help. I have to thank, in particular, the librarians from the Biblioteca Amadeu Amaral (Rio de Janeiro), from the Biblioteca Nacional in Rio de Janeiro and in Lisboa, Alex Badarel and Angela Lühning from the Fundação Pierre Verger (Salvador), and the staff from the Albert Sloman Library in Essex, in particular Chris Anderton and all the colleagues working at this marvellous invention called interlibrary loan.

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Potthast (University of Köln) and Dr David Treece (King's College, London) kindly agreed to act as referees for my research applications. Jonathan Manley from Frank Cass and Allison Scott from Routledge always took the time to answer my queries. Pol Briand's e-mails from Paris about capoeira history were each time enlightening. In Bahia, Carlinhos Pita, Geraldo da Costa Leal, and Ana Ramos helped me in different ways. Maísa Paranhos, Carolina Paranhos, Lourdes Figueiredo and Iolando Assunção received me in their respective homes. Zé Geraldo Portugal and Vera Tess in São Paulo and Catherine Grandy in Rio not only provided hospitality but also sent me capoeira books as soon as they were published in Brazil. The Lucenas—Claudia, Henrique and family—always offered me the shelter of their home. And Luzmira Zepa and Manaira Assunção provided inspiration for many years of this project.

Finally I would like to thank three friends, who—each in their own way—have shared their passion for capoeira and its history with me. Sharing materials is by no means natural in the capoeira universe. On the contrary, there is a curious 'tradition' whereby sources are kept hidden from others, in the somewhat mistaken view that keeping them secret increases the holder's power or prestige. Yet Frede Abreu, M.Luis Renato Vieira and M.Cobra Mansa have taught me that another form of behaviour is possible, by always offering fresh insights and new materials. If this book has some merits, it is certainly due to their way of departing from secret established mongering and engaging in true dialogue with others fascinated by the history of our art. I highly appreciated our exchange of ideas over the last years, which reminds me, at another level, of the dialogue that constitutes the true game in a capoeira *roda*.



# Introduction

Hail! Hail the nation  
Hail the Brazilian nation  
Hail Princesa Isabel, oh my God,  
Who delivered me from captivity!

(M.Canjiquinha<sup>1</sup>)

Lady Isabel, what story is this  
That you made abolition?  
That you are the nice princess  
That finished with slavery?  
I am tired of that idle chat  
I am tired of that illusion

(M.Toni Vargas<sup>2</sup>)

In most European and US cities one can see young people from different ethnic backgrounds and genders carrying around a musical bow, or *berimbau*. Twenty years ago this would have inevitably raised questions over the purpose of that strange device, but today many people recognize it as the basic musical instrument of capoeira. The use of an entire percussion orchestra shows that capoeira involves much more than mere physical exercise. Practitioners—typically between 16 and 35 years old—not only execute awkward movements to the rhythm of the orchestra, but also need to play these instruments, and to sing in Portuguese. Yet capoeira is much more than music and dance: it is a holistic art that develops creativity and theatricality and offers its own path towards spirituality. Since adepts need to train hard in a wide range of bodily techniques and intellectual skills, it also constitutes a martial art and, according to some, a spiritual discipline.

Capoeira furthermore provides a new identity, which is why it has become so important in our globalized world. Over the last half century, the practice of capoeira has spread from some relatively limited constituencies, in terms of geography, class, gender and ethnicity, to an ever-growing number of adepts in Brazil. During the 1980s and 1990s, capoeira expanded into Western Europe and the United States and is now practised in countries as diverse as Australia, Finland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Mozambique, Poland, Singapore, Switzerland, South Africa, and Venezuela. Conservative estimates for 1998 suggested that already 3 million people around the world were practising capoeira, a number that has been growing



ever since.<sup>3</sup> Capoeira has not only its own jargon and organizations, but also its own fashion, hundreds of fanzines and thousands of websites. Googling for capoeira results in 229,000 hits. This might still be less than the results for *aikido* (551,000), *judo* (899,000), *karate* (1.5 million) or boxing (2.750 million)—but capoeira is rapidly catching up with these more established martial arts or combat sports.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1990s, capoeira became another expression of postmodern chic, in the same way as mobile phones. In recognizing the link, a major company from Finland (Nokia) has made wide use of capoeira in its advertising. Capoeira is now seen as an integral part of the postmodern experience in globalized metropolises. Thus one of the new television channel indicators broadcast by the BBC in the United Kingdom features capoeira players on the roofs of London. They embody ‘cool Britannia’ and the new audiences British television aims to reach.<sup>5</sup> This book attempts to reconstruct the ways in which a disdained slave pastime and feared bodily weapon became a hip game for a whole generation.

Capoeira has a fascinating history. It features African warriors and their initiation cults, the horrors of the Middle Passage,<sup>6</sup> black slaves fighting policemen on the squares of colonial cities in the New World, and gangs of ‘tough guys’ promoting mayhem, terrorizing citizens or helping corrupt politician to rig elections. Capoeiristas confronted Portuguese stick fighters in the streets and Japanese *ju-jitsu* champions in the ring. They were flogged, imprisoned, and deported to distant Atlantic islands because of their practice. The military, bureaucrats and the tourist industry tried and sometimes succeeded in co-opting them. Yet one of the reasons capoeira fascinates young people all over the world is that it still seems to epitomize resistance: against the slave owner, the police, the establishment. One of the aims of this book is to show to what extent resistance was or was not a rhetorical device in capoeira history, and to question easy assumptions about the meaning of resistance.

History is paramount in contemporary capoeira practice. Not only do capoeira songs invoke famous players long dead and call to mind epic fights of the past, but they also refer to more embracing historical institutions, such as slavery and the resistance against it, wars fought by Brazilian soldiers, or any other episode that represented at some moment a landmark in popular memory. Not only the songs, but also the entire practice constitutes a ‘commemorative performance’, a re-enactment of capoeira’s ‘sinister past’. As Greg Downey has pointed out:

This past gives capoeira play gravity, revealing that capoeira was once a ‘deep and sinister business’, and menacingly suggests the possibility that it may still be. The *roda* of capoeira, especially among those who self-consciously cultivate ‘traditional’ practice, is a play space haunted by an epic history.<sup>7</sup>

Precisely because the past is at the very core of the game, every statement regarding capoeira history is likely to have serious implications for contemporary practice and the way practitioners and wider society perceive the art. During the twentieth century a number of competing versions of its history and, more particularly, its origins developed, emphasizing capoeira either as a New World ‘invention’ or as an African ‘extension’. Each of these conflicting interpretations sought to prove what the supposed ‘essence’ of capoeira is: African or Brazilian; a fight disguised in dance or a dance which became a fight.

The importance attributed to tradition, in particular to orally transmitted narratives, the role capoeira played and plays as a model of counter-hegemonic practice, the re-appropriation of the art by state institutions or by political activists pursuing their own agendas have all contributed to the establishment of powerful myths about capoeira history and the development of some master narratives. These all-pervasive discourses, in return, structure the perception of present-day practitioners and wider audiences. The two extracts from capoeira songs I used as an epigraph illustrate to what extent capoeira adepts, although practising the same art, can diverge over the meaning of its history, or over the significance of key

figures in the Afro-Brazilian experience. Princess Isabel, who in 1888 signed the ‘Golden Law’ abolishing slavery in Brazil, has for a long time been praised in capoeira circles as the philanthropic emancipator. Yet the emergence of Black movements in Brazil during the 1980s led to a fundamental re-assessment of her role, which is conveyed by the second, more recent and critical ‘litany’ (the introductory song in capoeira).

From the 1930s onward, the development of different modern styles generated even more heated controversies around the figures of their two founding fathers, the *mestres* (teacher, master) Bimba and Pastinha. Two conflicting master narratives again support divergent interpretations of the meaning of their innovations and, more generally, the modernization of cultural forms.

Before examining the history of capoeira, one needs to be aware of these fundamental assumptions that guide capoeiristas, scholars and other social actors in their appreciation of capoeira history. I will attempt to give a brief idea of how master narratives were constructed, by tracing their emergence within specific historical contexts and relating them to ongoing struggles over ethnic and national identity in Brazilian society, and, more recently, in a globalized context ([Chapter 1](#)). Capoeira, the black art of the male underdog, provides an important field where issues of race, class and gender are played out and renegotiated.

The second chapter discusses the polemical questions of the origin of capoeira by placing the art within the wider context of Black Atlantic and Afro-Brazilian popular culture and raises the general issue of cultural hybridity, commonly discussed in this more specific context under the term ‘creolization’. Capoeira provides a prime example of this process and thus allows for a better understanding of what complex dynamics creolization can entail. Conceiving capoeira as a creole art of the diaspora also avoids the pitfall of classifying a colonial form with anachronistic labels such as African or Brazilian and to disentangle the conundrum of its roots. I believe that we need to analyse the interaction between forms and context rather than searching for a genealogy of isolated elements of the art.

The third chapter deals with the *capoeiragem* in Rio de Janeiro during the nineteenth century, practised by slaves and freedmen, but also by European migrants, and how its practice was affected by these changes. The fourth chapter introduces the capoeira or ‘vagrancy’ in Bahia, which was the direct ancestor of modern capoeira. The contrast between these two regional variants of capoeira, and their distinct evolution, highlights the complex dynamics between formal aspects, social context and cultural meaning which allowed the development of elaborate rituals and bodily techniques. This also allows one to question—without discarding it entirely—the mantra of capoeira as resistance and to assess the importance of co-optation in these formative periods.

Chapters 5 and 6 look at the *mestres* who were paramount in the development of modern capoeira during the 1930s and 1940s, M.Bimba and M.Pastinha, and the emergence of the Regional and Angola styles. The last chapter (follows) the spread of capoeira throughout Brazil and the Western world during the last four decades and discusses the significance of contemporary styles. A closer look at these developments shows how modernization of a popular tradition is never homogenous or monolithic, but fragmented and multi-faceted, according to the multiple agendas of the different social actors involved. The examination of the recent worldwide dissemination of capoeira finally allows an insight into the cultural dynamics of globalization during the 1990s. At a time when capoeira runs the risk of becoming a mere commodity for globalized consumers, and of being hijacked for all kinds of other purposes, I think it is important to show, against all essentialist simplifications, that the art is the result of a rich and complex history. The awareness of the rich and contradictory texture of its traditions is necessary to avoid capoeira becoming a short-lived fashion that will disappear when it no longer fulfils the requirements of global markets, because it can provide inspiration for new strategies of resistance.



# The competing master narratives of capoeira history

## Myths, fakes and facts

During one dark night in the sixteenth century, the first slave escaped from the barracks, fled from the plantation, got rid of serfdom, gained freedom...The second escaped and the third, attempting to follow them, failed. Recaptured, he received the punishment proper for slaves [...] Pursuit followed without delay and the backlands became full of slave catchers hunting down runaways. Without weapons or munitions, the slaves turned warriors again using that sport born during the filthy nights of the slave huts, and the sport which had been disguised as dance was transformed into a fight, the fight of the men of the *capoeira*.<sup>1</sup>

The above extract from a contemporary capoeira journal, reiterates at least three of the powerful myths that have nourished the practitioners' hunger for history: the remote origins of capoeira; its invention, in Brazil, by maroons; and the disguise of the fight as a dance. The passage illustrates how the history of capoeira is told by many instructors or reproduced in handouts and manuals. The circulation of capoeira myths is however far from being restricted to a close knit group of practitioners uninterested in historical research. On the contrary, this mixture of facts and fiction is frequently reproduced in magazine articles, books and even academic journals and dissertations, which makes it all the more interesting to examine. A brief scrutiny of the core myths about capoeira history will allow us to illuminate some of the basic assumptions they rely on, and start our enquiry into the historical contexts in which they emerged. By myth I understand a rather simplistic view of some specific facet of capoeira history, which glosses over contradictory aspects and deliberately ignores the lack of evidence or even takes no notice of any contrary evidence that disproves what usually are essentialist claims. In some cases fakes—when evidence and sources are deliberately manipulated to conform to pre-conceived ideas—are also part of the arsenal of myth formation.

The belief in the remote origins of the art, coupled with the conviction that an unaltered 'essence' of capoeira has been transmitted from that foundational moment down to the present, confers greater authority to contemporary practice, and is therefore shared by many practitioners. The myth of the remote origins appears under three variants, each of which provides support and legitimacy for conflicting master narratives of national or ethnic identity.

The first version is that of its entirely Brazilian origins. As we are going to see in more detail, nationalist ideology helped to foster the myth of native Brazilians playing capoeira. In the words of one *mestre* and capoeira politician, author of a recent MA thesis in Social Sciences at the Catholic University of São Paulo:

The Father José de Anchieta in the year 1595 published a book with the title: The Grammar of the most used Language on the Coast of Brazil, in which exists a quote that ‘the Tupí-Guaraní entertained themselves playing capoeira’ [...] it is reported that Martim de Souza [Portuguese explorer and first governor of Brazil, 1531–1533] also observed tribes playing capoeira.<sup>2</sup>

Since no precise reference is given, one can but wonder about the nature of that supposed quote. In view of the fact that the term Tupí-Guaraní was only coined by modern ethnologists long after the Tupí had been exterminated along the Brazilian coast, one has to conclude that the quote is a fake, even though sanctioned by a respected academic institution. The absolute lack of evidence that native ‘Tupí-Guaraní’ played capoeira has, however, resulted in the weakening of this myth over the last decades, even though that now obsolete idea is still defended in some quarters in Brazil.

A far greater number of practitioners claim that maroons (runaway slaves) invented capoeira. Almost every book on capoeira history contains an initial chapter on slave resistance, where the heroic *quilombos* (maroon settlements) are always singled out for their fierce opposition to slave society.<sup>3</sup> Although not all authors explicitly associate capoeira and maroons, that connection is made plain by many, transforming for instance Zumbi, the famous icon of black resistance, into a capoeira fighter.<sup>4</sup> This story became so common place that the movie *Quilombo*, an official choice for the Cannes Film Festival in 1984, featured maroons fighting slave-catchers using capoeira movements. Directed by Carlos Diegues, with music by Gilberto Gil and starring singer Zezé Motta, it thus suggested that the art was already practised in the famous seventeenth-century ‘Black Republic’ of Palmares, a federation of maroon villages that resisted colonial authorities for almost a century in the mountains of Alagoas in North-Eastern Brazil.

The romanticized image of maroons practising capoeira has dominated historical accounts of the art for the last half century. It circulates under two different variants, one emphasizing the African heritage of the maroons and the other their proximity to nature. In the words of Almir Areias, capoeira *mestre* and author of an influential introductory booklet about capoeira, ‘not possessing enough arms to defend themselves, almost none of the conventional weapons of the time, it became necessary for the [runaway] slaves to discover a way to confront the weapons of their adversaries’. Although the author acknowledges that African ‘games, competitions, etc.’ might have contributed to its development, capoeira seems essentially to stem from the imitation of animals which cohabited with the maroons in the wilderness: ‘In that manner, imitating cats, monkeys, horses, oxen, birds, snakes, etc., the slaves discovered the first kicks of that fight’.<sup>5</sup> To support his claim, he asserts that

We have in some documents quotations of bush captains [slave catchers] and commanders of expeditions which, referring to the fights with the slaves, commented about ‘a strange game of the body’, which these used in the moment of fight, ‘as if they were truly untameable animals’.<sup>6</sup>

That sounds rather impressive, were it not again for the embarrassing detail that no precise reference is given and the quote de facto does not seem to exist—at least not in colonial documents. As we are going to see, however, this sentence was invented by a nationalist writer in the 1920s and has been cited ever since. Through frequent repetition these fake quotes acquired the value of ‘truth’. One can therefore hardly blame capoeira teachers like Areias, who only repeated in writing what everybody else had been reiterating for many years. Academics sometimes take on board that myth, assuming that it derives from some kind of oral tradition.<sup>7</sup> The attractiveness of the story is enhanced by the fact that it is quite plausible: Some kind of African inspired martial games probably existed among greater maroon settlements. Not one single contemporary source, however, has been found to confirm this hypothesis. And, more important, it is unlikely

that any such manifestation would have found its way back into the Brazilian cities, where Africans and their descendants were developing their own vibrant cultures and had no reason to adopt a game from distant backlands.

The last version of the tale of the remote origins attributes an entirely African origin to the art. In its most radical expression, it asserts rather bluntly that capoeira as such was practised in Angola. Transplanted to Brazil, it is supposed to have been performed without major alterations before spreading to the rest of the world:

It was more than four hundred years ago that the warriors of N'dongo (today known as Angola) faced the invading Portuguese Armies. In a bloody and bitter guerrilla war, the N'dongo warriors fought the Europeans using their native martial art of 'kapwera'—the Bantu verb meaning 'to fight'.<sup>8</sup>

As we are going to see in [Chapter 2](#), recent research on possible ancestors of capoeira shows some amazing continuities between Central African practices and contemporary capoeira. Yet despite these permanences, capoeira changed significantly over the last two centuries, and these transformations affected not only formal aspects and social context but also its cultural meaning. The myth of the unity of capoeira assumes that, on the contrary, that its 'perennial essences' and 'immutable characteristics' have not been altered. As will be discussed subsequently, it is more likely that different variants of capoeira developed in the various Portuguese colonies, and that the 'classical' form played in the harbour areas around the Bay of all the Saints (the Bahian Recôncavo) emerged only at a much later date, at the end of the nineteenth century.

So great is the desire to 'discover' a capoeira as similar as possible to contemporary practice in the remote past, that some do not hesitate to manipulate historical records. Today the game is accompanied by a musical bow called *berimbau*. Unfortunately one of the earliest iconographic representations of capoeira, the famous engraving by the Bavarian painter Johann Moritz Rugendas (1802–1858), 'Playing capoeira or war dance' (1835, see [Figure 3.1](#)), displays only a little drum and none of the 'traditional' instruments used in modern capoeira (*berimbau*, *atabaque*, *agogô*, *pandeiro* and *reco-reco*). Since the *berimbau* is today considered the 'soul' of capoeira, one of its intrinsic and constitutive parts, it cannot be lacking from any historical representation. The instrument is thus sometimes added to the picture, transforming a formerly passive spectator into an additional musician.<sup>9</sup> Academics, again, are not exempt from this attempt to adapt sources to pre-conceived models. US scholar Robert Farris Thompson commented on the same engraving by Rugendas as follows:

No later than 1835 the *berimbau*, as the *lungungu* came to be called in Brazil, was being used to fuel the capoeira martial art. This we know because Rugendas in an illustration shows two men in a *roda*, one doing the basic step, the *ginga*, at left, and the other, at right, apparently executing a step called *queixada*. They are in combat. Handclapping and a drum accompany their battle. But close examination of a man standing next to the drummer shows that he has a musical bow and is pulling open his shirt, probably to place the calabash-resonator of his instrument against his naked stomach in Kongo Angolan manner.<sup>10</sup>

As the reader can verify, nothing suggests that a *berimbau* is hidden in the picture. Moreover, the way in which such engravings were produced does not support the idea of the picture representing a moment prior to the full development of the game. Engravings were not photographs grasping an ephemeral/transient instant, but the result of a longer period of study, carefully recomposing the artist's observations, usually fixed in preliminary studies. If Rugendas had seen a *berimbau*, there is no reason why he would not have

included it in the final engraving. I do not want to suggest that his engraving escapes stylization and a particular approach towards slave culture. Yet it would not have made much sense for Rugendas to exclude the *berimbau*, an exotic instrument that appears in a number of other nineteenth-century engravings.

A further myth—always used to ‘explain’ the difficulty of writing capoeira history—is the suggestion that Rui Barbosa, finance minister of the first republican provisional government after the overthrow of the Brazilian Empire (1889) ‘had all the documents referring to slavery burned’.<sup>11</sup> This myth, particularly popular in non-academic capoeira circles, is based on the fact that Barbosa really did implement the destruction of files relating to slavery in his ministry. The most plausible explanation is that he wanted to get rid of the official register of slaves, introduced by the ‘Free Womb’ law of 1871. Their destruction would remove all evidence for slave owners wanting to claim compensation for the loss of their ‘property’, which in any case the Abolition decree of 13 May 1888 had not granted. However, the documents reduced to ashes represent but a tiny part of all archival records regarding slavery. As any student of history in Brazil knows, hundreds of thousands of documents documenting slavery do exist in Brazilian archives and many historians have been working with these sources over the last decades.<sup>12</sup>

A number of other myths about capoeira circulate within the different spheres where discourses about its history are elaborated. Many practitioners claim that capoeira is played to music, because during the times of slavery it had to be disguised as a dance in order to fool the slave owners. Unfortunately all the early sources on capoeira make quite clear that the masters were only too aware of the potential danger of capoeira practised by slaves. Another popular story explains that capoeira uses mainly foot kicks because slaves were chained together by their hands and had therefore only the feet left to use. Historical evidence, however, suggests that slaves had their feet in shackles to prevent them from running away, leaving their hands free to work.

What is the function of all these myths about the history of capoeira? As Roland Barthes asserted in his classical study: ‘Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact’.<sup>13</sup> Thus the myth abolishes the complexity of human actions, attributing to them the simplicity of ‘essences’, suppressing all dialectics and any pursuit beyond the immediately visible. When capoeira practitioners therefore emphatically affirm that ‘capoeira is—always—resistance’, they fail to consider the complexity of the insertion of their art into a wider context and the dialectics of resistance and betrayal that were so important in both slave and post-emancipation societies.

Myths are also paramount in the formation of identities. That function explains why mythical accounts tend to simplify or ‘purify’ contradictory developments, grant them clarity and found them in nature and eternity. Myths supports the narrative of what communities or nations decide to remember and they are constructed in such ways that oblivion can be facilitated. It closes the gaps generated by ruptures and discontinuities or even creates the myth of the forgotten and the anonymous in such a way as to make them identifiable, to grant them an identity. Capoeira became instrumental in the formation of national, regional and ethnic identities and in the interaction with these processes organized its own foundational myths and transcendental meanings. Deconstructing the myths about capoeira history can contribute to free the art with such a rich past and complex traditions from the rigidity that these versions of its origins and history impress on it, and that can turn its practice into a superficial performance of platitudes. If capoeira has allowed the construction of so many myths around it, this is due to the multiple ways in which it has acquired cultural significance in different historical contexts.

As with all other myths, the ones about Capoeira history only make sense within a wider social and cultural context. By tracing back how myths developed, I intend to show how central they were to the



elaboration and the dissemination of some master narratives that structure perceptions of and discourses about capoeira until the present day. These myths are but the crystallized, quintessential form of pre-conceived ideas about the development of capoeira or history in general. A myth is one of several available resources to reinforce the attraction of a particular master narrative, supporting the latter through its apparent logic and naturalness. In the following chapters I hope to demonstrate that capoeira history is far more contradictory and ambiguous—more than some of its practitioners might like.

For the sake of analysis I distinguish six paradigmatic discourses or master narratives, and try to locate their emergence in specific historical contexts. This is not possible without simplification. Positions are often more nuanced than I will represent them here, and sometimes overlap, combining arguments from several narratives. I nevertheless believe that this exercise will help the reader, especially the one unacquainted with current debates, to grasp what wider interests structure the field of capoeira history since the nineteenth century. The analysis of these narratives hopefully will illuminate the relevance of some painstaking discussions considered in the subsequent chapters of this book.

To reconstruct the various levels and types of discourses on capoeira that were elaborated by different social actors over time is an arduous task. Intellectuals and academics, government and authorities were not the only ones to formulate their views on capoeira. Yet only very occasionally can we get a glimpse of what nineteenth-century slave or free practitioners thought about their art. Nevertheless their views and practices clearly had an impact on the way authorities or intellectuals reflected on capoeira, and we have therefore to consider the problem of their interaction. Circularity undeniably existed between these different actors (practitioners, authorities, elites, scholars) and became stronger—and more visible—during the twentieth century. Since the ‘order of discourse’ tends to eradicate subaltern viewpoints, any attempt to reconstruct the formation of capoeira narratives risks to overestimate the impact of middle-class intellectuals. Although aware of that danger, I still think it is worthwhile to attempt to explain how master narratives on capoeira developed. My focus in this chapter is therefore on the history of ideologies, with only occasional references to institutions or social backgrounds when necessary.

### **‘Extirpate the canker’: Eurocentric repression**

The first discourse about capoeira we know of emphatically condemned the practice and implemented every possible means to eradicate it. First formulated by police officers and politicians, it was taken on board by the ruling elite and the middle class of urban slave owners. The elaboration of this discourse took place in a very specific historical moment and context, namely after the transmigration of the Portuguese court to Brazil, in 1808. For almost 14 years Rio de Janeiro became the provisional capital of the Portuguese Empire, before converting into the capital of a new empire in the tropics.

Until then, capoeira does not—as far as we know—figure in police records, mainly because no police really worth that name existed. For most of the colonial period, unarmed civilian watchmen had been in charge of ‘rudimentary vigilance’ in the city. Hired by the town council, they had no legal power of arrest.<sup>14</sup> The transmigration of the Portuguese court to the capital of a colony based on slave labour raised a range of security issues. Hence one of the first measures adopted by the prince regent João VI consisted in the establishment of a Police Intendant in Rio, and, subordinated to him, a Royal Police Guard, both replicas of similar institutions in Lisbon, themselves inspired by earlier French models. As Thomas Holloway, author of the most thorough study on the topic, states, ‘Capoeira was one of a range of “offences against the public order” that in themselves injured no person or property, but which those who set the rules and established the police found unacceptable’. Among all forms of behaviour considered improper by the elites, capoeira was always considered the most dangerous one for public safety. For that reason any slave

or freedman caught *in flagrante*, even though without doing any harm to property or persons, was to suffer immediate ‘correction’ in the form of brutal whipping. The arbitrary character of both the establishment of the rule and the ‘correction’ for its violation should not cause surprise, since the discourse of repression originated within the structures of an absolutist monarchy of the so called *ancien régime*. What is remarkable is rather how this discourse was adapted and survived the political changes of the subsequent period.

Brazilian Independence came in the form of a constitutional monarchy, which recognized civil rights (the right to vote, freedom of association, habeas corpus, etc.) for its citizens. These rights were enshrined in the 1824 Constitution, and granted to all Brazilians, including former slaves—as long as they were born in Brazil and not in Africa. In theory, and if they had the necessary property qualifications, freedmen thus enjoyed political rights (although subjected to several restrictions, not being eligible for any office). Slaves were not granted any rights, and were barely mentioned in the founding text of the nation. In practice, however, not only slaves, but freedmen and even the free poor remained subjected to the arbitrary practices of the police, suffering arrest, summary punishments in the form of whipping, and detention without trial.

Adapting the new liberal ideology to a highly stratified slave society that relied on heavy physical coercion to control even the poorer segment of its free population represented a major dilemma for Brazilian elites. Several attempts in the 1820s and 1830s to make police and judicial practice conform to liberal principles were met with strong opposition from conservative elites and civil servants alike and ultimately failed. On the other side, the criminalization of cultural practices such as capoeira was not consistent with liberal ideology, and legislators therefore found it difficult to formally outlaw its practice. This contradiction resulted in the curious situation whereby capoeira was neither included in the Criminal Code of the Empire (1830) nor any other law voted by parliament, and not even the municipal laws of the city of Rio.<sup>15</sup> Thus the repression of capoeira, albeit constant during the Empire, relied mainly on edicts and regulations issued by local police chiefs or similar authorities, which identified capoeira as a dangerous and disorderly practice.

The discourse advocating outright repression of capoeira was so hegemonic during most of the nineteenth century, that even scholars genuinely committed to the study of popular culture such as Sílvio Romero (1851–1914) despised the art and only lamented that: ‘The Police could never extirpate this canker.’<sup>16</sup> The celebrated writer [Joaquim Maria] Machado de Assis (1839–1908) asserted that the main reason capoeiras sliced up other peoples’ stomachs was the ‘eroticism of publicity’ and suggested therefore that newspapers should stop writing about them.<sup>17</sup>

After the proclamation of the republic (1889), the extinction of capoeira ranked even higher in the government’s priority. Capoeira was now seen as representing a hideous practice reflecting lower class, and particularly African, barbarism. It became therefore again paramount to eliminate this obstacle to progress. For the new rulers, inspired by the authoritarian ideologies of conservative modernization such as positivism and social Darwinism, the elimination of capoeira became part of the necessary hygienization of Brazil’s capital. They therefore had few scruples in formally outlawing capoeira. The Criminal Code of 1890 dedicated one chapter to Vagrants and capoeiras’. The first three articles criminalized idleness; the last three exclusively dealt with capoeira (see [Chapter 3](#)).

Although now finally enshrined in the Criminal Code of the Republic, the discourse of repression started to be challenged by a growing numbers of middle-class and elite individuals. Even though no longer hegemonic after the 1940s, the longevity of that discourse had long lasting effects. The association of capoeira with the underworld of vagrancy, crime and marginality was not completely inaccurate; it nevertheless did not take into account the insertion of many, if not most *capoeiras* in the world of labour (see [Chapters 3 and 4](#)). It therefore not only contributed in strengthening prejudices—even amongst the

popular classes—against *capoeiras*, but also reinforced many of the clichés about capoeira which still haunt the art today, namely that it encourages idleness and violence.

### In search of the ‘Brazilian race’: nationalism I

The construction of national symbols in Brazil has been, as elsewhere, subjected to periodical redefinitions. The very meaning of what constituted a nation evolved substantially since the late eighteenth century, when it only meant people borne by the same mother or, by extension, from similar ancestry. The term was even used to denote opposition to civilized or Christian *peoples*, and that is why European colonial sources so frequently refer to African *nations*. During most of the nineteenth century intellectuals and politicians argued about the ‘national principle’; discussions then evolved around the ‘national idea’ or the ‘national question’. These changes in terminology reflect shifts in emphasis on how the nation was to be defined: by territory, language, religion, race or political loyalties.<sup>18</sup>

The first substantial elaboration of what supposedly constituted the Brazilian national character coincided with the Age of Revolution in the Atlantic world and the period of decolonization in the Americas, 1773–1848.<sup>19</sup> Even though all free groups did have their own ideas about what it meant to be Brazilian, the dominant groups imposed their hierarchical and exclusive model. The aftermath of independence in Brazil (1822) coincided with the establishment of Romanticism as the predominant art movement among the literary elites. The tropical nature of most of the Brazilian territory, which had already impressed colonial writers of European origin, furnished an evergreen theme to define the nation. Building on the pastoral tropes of the Enlightenment, romantic writers exalted in even stronger colours the Brazilian nature. They founded a core national myth that was to have a long lasting impact on the national imagination.<sup>20</sup>

The elites’ search for the national roots of Brazilian identity, keen to distance itself not only from the former colonizer, the Portuguese, but also from the enslaved Africans considered inferior, concentrated therefore on its original inhabitants. Native Brazilians seemed to provide an outstanding example of a life in harmony with nature. Writers such as José de Alencar and Gonçalves Dias exploited the edenic motive of the Indian in the Brazilian wilderness. In their work, the native Indian is stylized and romantically transfigured into a medieval knight. The first literary symbol of Brazilian-ness hence resembled a key character of European romanticism. It is here that we can locate the remote origins of the myth that depicts capoeira as a creation inspired by the Brazilian nature.

Intellectuals were by no means the only ones to devise symbols of identity and nationhood. Other social groups had quite different perceptions of the nation. The urban lower classes generally couched their ‘nativist’ reactions against colonialism in strong anti-colonial and anti-Portuguese language. As in many other national struggles for independence, the bashing of metropolitans (insulted as *caiaados* or ‘white washed’) became a common feature of political conflict during and after decolonization in Brazil. Popular lusophobia might not have been more than a negative way of defining the national character, but it re-emerged later in the century and was always strongly associated with extreme nationalism. Although sources are not very extensive about popular views of the emerging nation, some documents from mainly urban rebellions suggest that a radical version of liberalism advocated equal rights for citizens of all colours, only excluding the African slaves. Harsh repression, however, drove more inclusive visions of a democratic empire into oblivion or at least limited their wider impact.

Even though the resident Portuguese insulted Brazilian patriots in return as *cabras* (goats, dark skinned mulattos), it seems that these rarely adopted African ancestry or even miscegenation as a positive value. Most, especially the lighter-skinned patriots, preferred to identify instead with the Native Americans. Many

adopted Indian names as a way to distance themselves from Iberian roots without having to associate with symbols of Afro-Brazilian culture.

As racial theories became hegemonic in nineteenth-century European science, the racial factor gained more and more weight in the discussions about the national character. Brazilian intellectuals were thus caught in a rather unenviable dilemma: They could hardly challenge European science without ridiculing themselves, but accepting racial determinism invariably led to a pessimist assessment of their country's possibilities of development. Hence most appraisals after the 1860s tended to lament the racial handicap of Brazilians whose ancestors were, in their majority, Africans or Indians.<sup>21</sup> Nineteenth-century European racial theories were however far from uniform. They all shared, unsurprisingly, the belief in white superiority, but clashed over crucial aspects such as the meaning of miscegenation. Polygenic approaches tended to dismiss *mestiços* as degenerate or even sterile (*mulato* is derived from mule!), whereas monogenic theories eventually allowed for the racial 'improvement' of a population. Some Brazilian scholars very skilfully picked out the aspects of different theories that suited them most, and developed their own conceptions. Prominent among these was the theory of 'whitening', whereby a population with inferior racial characteristics, such as the Brazilian, could improve over time through the continuous influx of white immigrants. At the time of its conception, the ideology of whitening therefore seemed to offer an alternative to the absolute pessimism that haunted so many Brazilian intellectuals during the period 1870–1930.<sup>22</sup>

What is important to emphasize, however, is that these conceptions of the *mestiço*, far from representing a neutral middle ground where the three original 'races' fused, only designated an intermediate stage in the 'whitening' process, not a final destination. Miscegenation was positive only insofar as it led to more and more people becoming white and adopting the 'superior' European culture. It is precisely because ideologies enhancing the positive values of miscegenation have been historically associated with the whitening ideology promoting an assimilationist model that black movements tend to dismiss all of them as a white strategy of ethnocide.<sup>23</sup>

Not all intellectuals advocated such extreme assimilation, because it was so obviously in contradiction with Brazilian reality. Since the creation of the Historical and Geographical Institute, in 1838, a more historicist tradition had gained a foothold in Brazil. Karl von Martius, author of one of the founding texts of the institution, albeit recognizing the racial and cultural superiority of the Portuguese, had already insisted that 'the genius of world history' 'frequently resorts to mixing the races to obtain the world order's most sublime ends' and argued for example that the English nation also owed its national character to the mixture of different peoples.<sup>24</sup> The *mestiço* could therefore, according to some, become a new racial type, and by the same token, lose the negative characteristics most racial theorists associated with the unstable 'mixed blood'.

The Germanophile Sílvia Romero, author of the first *History of Brazilian Literature* (1888) was a precursor in that direction. Although he initially almost despaired over the racial handicap of Brazilians and even dismissed the dominant Iberian stock as inferior when compared to the Germanic sub-types, he considered the possibility of a new, original *mestiço* type, a result of race mixture and the environment. Not only did he advocate the study of the customs of the Brazilian people, but also made important contributions towards that end, in particular in the field of popular poetry, following the German romantic model of searching cultural roots of the nation in its folklore. His method consisted in identifying the original elements that the *mestiço* combined.

Euclides da Cunha (1866–1909) made a further, extremely influential contribution in his book *Rebellion in the Backlands* (1902), where he suggested that the Brazilian *mestiço* had already developed specific characteristics. He described the emergence of a messianic leader, Antônio Conselheiro, and the war of extermination the Brazilian army waged against him and his 20,000 followers, denigrated as 'fanatics' and

monarchists by the press. Although initially da Cunha wanted to prove the degeneration of the *mestiço*, he became so impressed with the heroic resistance of the charismatic leader and his supporters, that he concluded the isolation of the semiarid *sertão* (backlands) did have positive effects on the racial type (which was rather in contradiction to his theoretical assumptions). Da Cunha was part of a whole generation of writers, such as Capistrano de Abreu and Coelho Neto, who stigmatized the cities as Europeanized whereas the true Brazil was to be found in the vast interior.<sup>25</sup> The idea that 'authentic' cultural manifestations were located in the backlands became another persistent theme that re-emerged again in capoeira history, reappearing for instance in the already mentioned myth of the maroon capoeira.

In summary, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the *mestiço* provided intellectuals searching for the national character with a new subject on which to graft their theories. The advantage of the new way of defining the Brazilian nation was that miscegenation and its outcome, the *mestiço*, 'allowed constructing the image of a homogenous social totality'.<sup>26</sup> This became ever more crucial as new waves of immigrants were disembarking on the country's shores in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Racial theories also shaped immigration policies. 'Industrious' European workers were supposed to improve the 'Brazilian race' through whitening. Black labourers from Africa or North America were clearly undesirable, and even Asians (Chinese) were initially rejected, though a quarter of a million Japanese were later allowed to enter the country. This shift in policy reflects not only a lack of firm consensus among the elites, but also an important change in the ways foreign migrants were perceived and integrated. As enthusiasm for European workers was tamed by their labour activism or their unwillingness to assimilate, intellectuals and politicians increasingly worried about the consequences of massive immigration for nation building and the need to construct a Brazilian identity not based on the emulation of European models or a linear process of whitening.

Popular resentment against the favouritism Portuguese male migrants commonly enjoyed when applying for jobs or competing for Brazilian women expressed itself in the revival of the anti-Portuguese imagery in the independence period. The so-called Jacobins, a radical nationalist, pro-republican movement in the 1880s and 1890s, built upon these resentments to gather support in Rio de Janeiro, the city with the largest Portuguese community. This context of growing ethnic diversity, resulting in the multiplication of 'hyphenated identities', can explain the national obsession with a homogenous *mestiço* representing Brazil.<sup>27</sup>

Given the intense discussions among Brazilians regarding national character and race, it is not surprising that the two founding texts of capoeira studies written in the 1880s associate the art with the *mestiço*. Plácido de Abreu, a Portuguese-born writer and bohemian, a practitioner of capoeira himself, denied that it had African or Indigenous origins: 'The most rational [explanation] is that *capoeiragem* was created, developed and perfected among us [in Brazil]'.<sup>28</sup> The decisive contribution for the association of capoeira and the national character came from Alexandro José Mello Moraes Filho (1844–1919). Contrary to Romero (who prefaced his work), Mello Moraes disapproved of large-scale European immigration and the Europeanization of customs heralded by the elite as the only means to progress. He advocated that urban popular culture, in particular the Catholic festivals, constituted the privileged site where the Brazilian national character had developed.<sup>29</sup> His classic account *Festivals and Popular Traditions*, first published in 1888, described both secular and religious festivals and celebrations, mainly in Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, always reputed to be more Luso-tropical than the Europeanized South.<sup>30</sup>

In the last section of his book, dedicated to 'street types', he portrayed *capoeiragem* as 'a heritage of miscegenation and the conflict of races'.<sup>31</sup> Quoting the examples of European games and fights, from antique Roman wrestling to French *savate*, Portuguese stick fighting or British rowing and boxing, he concluded that they 'contribute to add a further feature to the national physiognomy', and that capoeira should therefore be considered as part of the 'history of our customs'. Given that, at the same time, capoeira

was perceived as a major threat by the elites and vigorously persecuted by the new Republican regime (see [Chapter 3](#)), Mello Moraes took great pains to justify the practice. In order to dismiss the negative aspects of what he considered the ‘national fight’ (‘luta nacional’), he constructed a golden age of capoeira, which he located in the first half of the nineteenth century, when capoeira was an art that developed strength, flexibility and speed and had not yet ‘degenerated’ into disorderly behaviour, such as homicides and aggression. As Letícia Reis has shown, Mello Moraes needed to invert the basic chronology of capoeira development in order to support his argument.<sup>32</sup> He emphasized the skills of middle-class officers or teachers in the art, supposedly before the ‘national fight was enthusiastically taken to excesses by the lower classes’. The nationalist discourse was already influencing perceptions and structuring interpretations of capoeira, misrepresenting a black slave practice as a *mestiço* art.

The celebrated writer Aluísio Azevedo (1857–1913) provided the perfect literary illustration of Mello Moraes’ argument. His novel ‘*A Brazilian Tenement*’, first published in 1890, describes one of the *cortiços* (‘beehives’), the dilapidated, unhygienic downtown dwellings where ex-slaves and poor Portuguese migrants lived next to each other.<sup>33</sup> The plot revolves around Rita Baiana, the stereotypical mulatto beauty, courted by both the Portuguese stonecutter Jerônimo and the Brazilian Firmo, also a mulatto. In the final confrontation between the two rival males, which symbolizes the wider conflict between Portuguese and Afro-Brazilians, both make use of their national fighting art: Jerônimo grasps his fighting stick, and Firmo, chief of a capoeira gang, employs his *mandinga* to avoid blows and finally slices his opponent’s stomach up with a razor. Azevedo’s naturalist approach made him draw a rather unfavourable or even pathological picture of lower-class behaviour, but he helped to consecrate capoeira as the typical art of the urban *mestiço*.

As I hope to have made clear, the shifting significance of *mestiço* identities in the construction of a Brazilian national discourse affected the meaning of capoeira from the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards. As national identities were constructed more and more around popular cultural manifestations, and elites became increasingly aware that the only observable homogeneity of the Brazilian people consisted in an immense array of mixtures, the attitude towards capoeira evolved substantially. At the very moment capoeira was being eradicated from the streets of Rio de Janeiro by ruthless repression, the absolute criminalization of its practice was increasingly questioned by a growing number of middle-class people. They adopted a more benevolent even if still highly ambivalent attitude towards the art, because they considered it a possible tool in the construction of Brazilian identity. Yet for capoeira to become a marker of Brazilian-ness, its slave origins had to be hidden and its *mestiço* character emphasized.

### The search for a Brazilian gymnastics: nationalism II

The growth of imperialist rivalries in the decades prior to World War I seemed to confirm the teachings of Social Darwinism on a global scale: survival was only possible for the fittest and strongest nations. Since drafted conscripts were now fighting in large scale wars, strategists underlined the importance of national recruits—and therefore the entire male population—being well trained. Early attempts to develop specifically national methods of training began in Europe during the early nineteenth century. In Denmark Franz Nachtegall (1777–1847) had founded the Military Institute of Gymnastics in 1804; physical education became a compulsory discipline in Danish schools as early as 1814. In Germany Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1776–1839) built the first gymnastics ground (*Turnplatz*) in 1811, initiating the movement of Gymnastics Associations (*Turnvereine*). Ever since, gymnastics has been seen as a means to improve the male fitness of the nation and therefore its martial capacity. For that reason the military have always been associated with the search for national gymnastics.



In that context the Japanese victory over Russia, in 1905, contributed to the questioning, if not the collapse of the previous stereotype of the effeminate oriental, and awakened Western interest in Oriental martial arts, and in particular the Japanese *Budo*. *Ju-jitsu* masters started to travel around the world to show their skills and challenge local fighters. As we are going to see in Chapter 5, this resulted in an intense interaction between Eastern and Western martial arts. For Brazilian nationalists, these developments confirmed the urgency to identify and develop a national fighting art, and once again they turned their attention towards capoeira.

In one of the first extensive reports on capoeira published in 1906, the anonymous author L.C., like so many others, picked up the comparison made earlier on by Mello Moraes between French *savate*, Japanese *ju-jitsu*, English boxing, Portuguese stick fighting and Brazilian capoeira. The author (later identified with Lima Campos) emphasized that the latter was the only one of these five ‘great popular fighting arts’ whose essential merit resided not in attack but in defence, which allowed him to consider it superior to all the others. Lima Campos traced the origin of capoeira back to the violent days of Brazilian independence, where in the ‘constant clashes between nationalities’, the physically weaker (the ‘mixed-race’ Brazilians) had to defend themselves against the aggressions of these with more robust constitution (the Portuguese):

Created by the inventive spirit of the *mestiço*, because capoeira is neither Portuguese nor black, [but] mulatto, *cafusa* [mixture of Indian and black] and *mameluca* [mixture of Indian and white], that is, cross-breed, *mestiço*; the *mestiço* having annexed, through atavistic principles and with intelligent adaptation, the razor of the *fadista* from the Mouraria [popular, former Moorish neighbourhood] of Lisbon, some danced and simian [monkey-like] movements of the African, and, above all, the dexterity, the feline lightness of the Indian in the quick jumps from one side to the other and forwards, weightless and unpredictable, and surprisingly, as a Royal tiger, backwards, but always facing the enemy.<sup>34</sup>

Again, the slave origins of capoeira were negated or greatly diminished through the invention of an Indian tradition, which had the advantage of appearing, at the time, more noble (as in noble savage) and truly Brazilian.

These discussions among *Belle Époque* intellectuals were not merely academic, but reflected wider concerns about nation building which also involved journalists, politicians and the army. During that same year the Brazilian parliament debated conscription again, which army reformers had been asking for since the establishment of the republic, and which was finally adopted in 1916. Both popular classes and liberals opposed general conscription. For many, life in the barracks, far from constituting an elevating experience, encouraged sodomy or made conscripts more likely to be cuckolded.<sup>35</sup> It therefore threatened rather than enhanced the conscripts’ manhood. At that stage new military models of masculinity were imported from abroad. The British Boy Scouts (founded in 1908) became widely popular in Brazil. Only then did military-style training become more fashionable and even acceptable for the sons of the well to do.

The humiliating military defeat against Germany in 1870 had made the French military keen not only to make gymnastics compulsory in schools but also to have the military involved in its teaching. The Ministry of War fomented the unification of a national method of gymnastics, and this effort resulted in a number of manuals teaching the ‘French method’ in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The Brazilian military adopted the French method in the 1920s, because they considered it the most suited for the ‘Latin temperament’ of their people, of course only until a ‘truly national’ method for Brazilians was developed.<sup>36</sup>

Anyone searching for a national gymnastics had, sooner or later, to address the issue of capoeira and how to make it suitable for national objectives. As early as 1907 an anonymous officer of the army had published



a 'Guide to Capoeira or the Brazilian gymnastics', a first attempt to systematize capoeira movements, establishing the difference between the various types of postures, feints and blows.<sup>37</sup> The federal deputy Henrique Coelho Neto (1864–1934) claimed to have discussed the same idea with two friends at the time. According to him, they even considered sending a project to the Brazilian parliament that would establish *capoeiragem* as a compulsory discipline in state owned institutions and the barracks. They 'gave up that idea, however, because other people found it ludicrous, just because that game was...Brazilian.'<sup>38</sup> Coelho Neto was an influential nationalist writer whose residence was a favourite meeting place for intellectuals.<sup>39</sup> He also practised capoeira and expressed his strong views about the matter in an article he entitled 'Our game', where he reiterated his view that capoeira should be taught in colleges, barracks and battleships because it 'harmoniously develops the body and is a means of self-defence superior to all others which are praised by foreigners [...]'.<sup>40</sup>

The idea that capoeira was 'our game' gained increasing popularity among nationalist, middle-class Brazilians. The journalist Raul Pederneiras for instance published an extensive article entitled 'The National Defence' (1921), in which he reiterated all the previous arguments to support the view that capoeira suited Brazil more than any imported sport.<sup>41</sup> Another journalist synthesized his strong view about the fighting art to which the Brazilians should give preference in the suggestive appeal: 'Let's cultivate the capoeira game and feel revulsion for boxing!' Many other writers, including Coelho Neto, picked up his slogan. One of them complained that Brazilians were unfortunately ashamed of capoeira, 'but we get ape-likely, ridiculously carried away with that brutish, Afro-British thing called boxing'. Echoing da Cunha he recommended:

If you want to cultivate an elegant game, adequate for self-defence, a game of noble dexterity which is not brutal and demeaning, there you have our unsurpassable and invincible capoeira game, a game born from racial and environmental factors which shaped our nascent race.<sup>42</sup>

Racial stereotypes concerning the 'weakness' of 'mixed-bloods' were sometimes associated with the cliché of the supposed physical inferiority of the 'Negro'. Thus Adolfo Morales de los Ríos (1887–1973), an Argentinian engineer and writer residing in Rio, reiterated the idea that 'the capoeiragem is a creation made by the weak—the Negro and the *mestiço*—against the strong: the white. The vigour of the latter is challenged by the cunning of the others'.<sup>43</sup> More common though was to contrast the strong white and black with the feeble *mestiço*, which 'explained' why capoeira was not primarily relying on physical strength, but rather on dexterity. Luis Edmundo (1878–1961) in his description of the archetypical mulatto capoeira, which he inaccurately transplanted back into the colonial period, clarifies that 'the *capoeira*' despite not having 'the athletic complexion of the Negro and not even the healthy and vigorous look of the Portuguese', still commands respect. 'All his strength resides in this amazing elastic dexterity, in front of which the European tumbles, and the African, astonished, retreats'.<sup>44</sup> Like so many other authors, he identified both negative and positive aspects (courteous, defender of the weak, deeply religious) of the capoeira and admitted the possibility of his ultimate redemption: 'Basically he is bad because he lives where there is trade in vice and crime. Socially, he is a cyst, but he could be a flower'.<sup>45</sup>

Having identified qualities and defects of both the Brazilian race and character, one issue inevitably arose. If the racial type could be improved through 'whitening', could the national character also be enhanced by eliminating its most negative aspects? In that respect eugenics were to race what hygienization was to the culture of the popular classes. Writers such as Mello Moraes and Coelho Neto only deplored the 'degeneration' of capoeira and considered the possibility of redemption from its 'vices', but made no concrete plans how this was to be achieved. Only during the period of intense cultural renovation



Figure 1.1 Myth: the romanticized and anachronistic image of the mulatto capoeira projected back into colonial times. Drawing from Luiz Edmundo, *O Rio de Janeiro nos tempos dos vice-reis* (1763–1808), (Rio de Janeiro, 1936); Albert Sloman Library, Essex University.

inaugurated by the ‘Week of Modern Art’ in 1922, did these attitudes start to be channelled into more tangible proposals. Perhaps inspired by the already mentioned O.D.C., Anibal Burlamaqui designed the first method for a national gymnastics based on capoeira, launched as a pamphlet in 1928.<sup>46</sup> As the preface of his work stated, it was ‘a battle cry for *brasilidade*’ (‘Brazilian-ness’). The author, a sportsman, practitioner of Swedish gymnastics, athletics and boxing, departed from earlier nationalist views insofar as he recognized the slave origins of capoeira. According to him, runaway slaves invented the art. They did not build on previous African traditions, but rather developed it in the intimate contact with nature and whilst resisting their capture: the maroons, ‘fraternizing with the animals’ in the wilderness, ‘jumping from one [tree] to the next like monkeys’, became ‘extraordinarily dexterous’. They developed a ‘strange game of arms, legs, head and rump, with such an agility and such violence, able to give them a fabulous superiority [over the slave catchers]’. The last sentence became a catchphrase repeated ad infinitum by future generations of capoeiristas. I think Burlamaqui should be given credit for inventing the powerful myth of runaway slaves creating capoeira in the wilderness.

The development of capoeira, according to Burlamaqui, ‘encapsulates, although still a bit confused and ill defined, all the elements for a perfect physical culture, in accordance with our environment.’<sup>47</sup> His proposal was simple: ‘I, therefore, being a Brazilian, loving where I belong to, idealized a rule to offer it and make it a sport, an exercise, a game [...]’. His proposal, once more reflected the idea that capoeira, in order to serve national ideals, had to be hygienized, adapted, and reformed. Yet for the first time, someone had developed a concrete training method based on these nationalist principles.

After 1920 racial theories came increasingly under attack in US academia. Anthropologists such as Franz Boas (1858–1942) and later Ashley Montagu (1905–1999) challenged all the common assumptions of racial

inferiority of non-whites and the very existence of human races. The concept of ‘race’ was being substituted by that of ‘culture’, and the social and cultural environment now explained differences among human beings. That change of paradigm had a profound impact on Brazil, in particular through the work of Gilberto Freyre (1900–1987), who studied anthropology with Boas. His classic essay on the genesis of Brazilian society, *The Masters and Slaves* (1933) valorized, for the first time, the biological miscegenation of white masters and enslaved Indians and Africans. According to him, a parallel process of cultural hybridization had taken place in Brazil, resulting in the adoption of Indian and African elements in Brazilian culture. Later critics have pointed out that his writings are rather ambiguous and still contain reminiscences of racial ideology. Freyre, for instance, still indulged in stereotyped judgements about Africans and native Brazilians and their ‘exalted sexuality’ or ‘hot mysticism’.<sup>48</sup> Yet this was a new, and more positive approach towards the Brazilian population and thus the potential of the Brazilian national character. Widely acclaimed in the 1930s, his work remained very influential throughout the twentieth century. For instance, since Freyre the metaphor of biological miscegenation has been frequently used to describe cultural processes of hybridization. Furthermore, his work was paramount to formulate the myth of racial democracy, a device through which subsequent Brazilian governments avoided any discussion of the racial discrimination occurring in the country.

Major political change also altered the ways *brasilidade* was discussed and promoted. The revolution of 1930 profoundly restructured the whole field of culture. From now on the state was to have an important, if not decisive role in cultural management. Keen not to leave out any aspect of ‘national life’, the Vargas regime greatly expanded the budget for education and created new institutions whose role was to foster ‘cultural development’. This included not only the preservation of cultural patrimony, but also support for ‘patriotic causes’ such as physical education.<sup>49</sup>

Since the state now appeared keen to invest in culture, many intellectuals accepted playing a role in the process, even if they had substantial reservations about the regime. Cultural nationalism became hegemonic during the period 1930–1964 and has remained influential at state level ever since. Yet if the Vargas regime promoted ‘national culture’, there never was consent within the administration about what exactly should be encouraged and supported. Traditionalists eager to sponsor the neo-colonial style clashed with modernists promoting disciples of Le Corbusier. The ‘culture wars’ fought between these factions resulted in cultural policies often being ambivalent, and single institutions pursuing opposite goals.<sup>50</sup> Modernists were strong within the Ministry of Education and Health, but popular culture was dealt with by the Department of Press and Propaganda (the infamous DIP), also responsible for censorship. Concepts of hygienization rather than outright support guided the DIP’s intervention in popular culture, instructing for instance composers to praise the hard worker rather than the rogue (malandro) in their carnival songs.

Regarding capoeira the Vargas regime also reversed the position of the state, and authorized the first capoeira academy, although along the lines of an ‘improved’ and ‘regenerated’ form (see [Chapter 5](#)). More importantly, the 1937 Constitution instituted compulsory physical education in all schools. All new teachers, even civilians, were enrolled at the School of Physical Education of the Army. An army officer was appointed chief of the new Division of Physical Education (DEF), who imposed the teaching of the French method throughout the country. Ever since, physical education in Brazil has been closely associated with the military. Inspired by the apparent success of fascism in Europe, military and civilians associated with the DEF promoted the idea that physical education helped to improve the ‘Brazilian race’. Inezil Penna Marinho, a civilian member of the DEF staff, explicitly praised Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany, and claimed in 1944 ‘that each teacher of physical education is a soldier of Brazil, a soldier who not only fights in times of war, but also during peace [...]’<sup>51</sup>

Marinho also was a capoeirista, and a student and admirer of Burlamaqui. During many years he tried to convince his superiors that capoeira should become the Brazilian gymnastics. In a 1944 monograph, awarded by the DEF and published a year later, he proposed a capoeira ‘training plan’, which reiterated much of Burlamaqui’s work. In the first part he gave a detailed account of capoeira history, which departed in some aspects from his master’s interpretation. One of the reasons was that the writings on capoeira from the Bahian School such as Querino and Carneiro (analysed below) had made clear that capoeira was more than a by-product of colonial exploitation and resistance to slavery in the Brazilian environment, and that it also built on earlier African traditions. This resulted in a slight re-adaptation of the nationalist discourse on capoeira. The African origin (and Querino’s and Carneiro’s work) were now acknowledged, but the *mestiços* and mulattos were still credited with having ‘developed’ the art further:

Although originally from the blacks (*negros*), *capoeiragem* was assimilated and developed by the *mestiços*—mulattos, finding a productive field and new qualities to explore.<sup>52</sup>

The influence of racial theories was steadily declining in the world after 1945. Yet Brazilian nationalists, in particular sympathizers of European fascism such as Marinho, often clung to these outdated theories. Marinho and many others still reproduced the stereotype of the intelligent and skilful mulatto during subsequent decades:

[...] more intelligent than the black and more dexterous than the white, the mulatto became the ideal type of capoeira, excessively arrogant in his worry to show that he had not the deference of the black slave.<sup>53</sup>

Marinho also issued a ‘capoeira prayer’ that summarizes the most extreme nationalist aspirations regarding capoeira:

From the inner depths of my being arises a new craving for corporal expression, as if my soul had escaped from centuries of oppression. I shall no longer be compelled to repeat the typical gestures of cultural affirmation of other nations. I have succeeded in freeing myself from those rhythms that obsessed me, upset the balance of my movements, and suppressed the musicality of my forebears. At last I became aware of my own rhythm, which helped me cast off age-old inhibitions and allowed me to give free rein to my feelings, hopes, thoughts, and ideals! Now I am free! I profoundly respect the physical culture of other nations, but I need, want, and must perform my own—the BRAZILIAN GYMNASTICS!<sup>54</sup>

This prayer completely erases any references to slavery, colonialism and class antagonism so central to capoeira history. They are sacrificed for the sake of a homogenous nation created by unspecified ancestors. As we are going to see in [Chapter 7](#), the exaltation of Brazil in capoeira, especially in capoeira Regional circles, has not stopped ever since. The persistence of what I suggest to call, in analogy with other Brazilian nationalist art movements, the ‘capoeira verde amarela’ (green and yellow are the national colours of Brazil) is the result of a long standing tradition. With roots in the patriotism of Brazilian independence and the nationalist surge of the First Republic, it developed in particular during the intense nationalist mobilization of the populist regimes (1945–1964) and the nationalist indoctrination promoted by the military dictatorship (1964–1985).

Yet the use and abuse of Brazilian-ness also relates to more genuine needs for identity affirmation in an increasingly globalized world. Given the ‘Americanization’ of culture on a global scale, capoeira has become for Brazilians—alongside samba and football—an important tool in the struggle to resist cultural imperialism, to reaffirm their national identity and to highlight their contribution to international popular culture. In that respect it is understandable how legitimately shocked they feel when confronted with the competing ethno-nationalist discourse advocating the African character of capoeira.

### **The search for purity and survivals: ethnic perspectives**

Although no direct testimonies from slave *capoeiras* survived, some sources suggest that the game provided a space for the expression of African ethnic identities. Slaves caught playing capoeira in the 1810s and 1820s often displayed markers of their particular ethnic origins, such as hats or feathers. As capoeira in Rio became more creolized, affiliations with particular gangs tended to replace earlier expressions of ethnic identity (see [Chapter 3](#)). In Bahia, however, capoeira continued to be associated with Africa, in particular with slaves from Kongo and Angola—generically known as ‘Angolas’—and their descendants. Schoolteacher and reformer Manuel Querino (1851–1923), to whom we owe one of the first detailed accounts of the art in Salvador, reported that capoeira was known as a ‘game’ (*brinquedo*) and had been introduced to Brazil by the slaves from Angola. Following Mello Moraes in Rio, he enhanced the folkloric side of capoeira and suggested it ranked equally to other national sports. Querino, an Afro-Brazilian, did not support the dominant racist theories of his time, perhaps an indication that these were less pervasive among non-white Brazilians than some scholars seem to suggest. Yet he still occasionally indulged in ethnic stereotyping, describing ‘the Angola’ as ‘generally pedantic, excessively chatty, with affected gestures’. He contrasted Bahian and Rio folklore, and the heroism of the Northeastern capoeira with his Cariocan counterpart, which he judged to be a ‘dangerous element’.<sup>55</sup>

Since Salvador did not experience comparable levels of European or Asian migration, its population continued to be overwhelmingly of African descent after the abolition of slavery. Direct trade links with the West African coast and some other factors facilitated the reconstitution of particular African identities in the forms of ‘nations’ (see [Chapter 4](#)). The existence of a particularly vibrant Afro-Brazilian community and culture was certainly paramount to the development of a local school of thought that sought to study Bahian religion and culture. Both the search for a national character and the fears over the degeneration of the ‘Brazilian race’ fostered a fresh interest in Afro-Brazilian culture. Raymundo Nina Rodrigues (1862–1906), professor of medicine in Salvador, is credited with the founding of the ‘Bahian school’ of Afro-Brazilian studies. He still remained within the paradigms of European racial theories of his time, advocating for instance, that Negroes and Indians, being racially inferior, could not be expected to behave like whites and thus the Criminal Code should not treat them as equals.<sup>56</sup> Yet the intimate knowledge of Afro-Bahia religion made him realize that Brazilian society had not succeeded in ‘desafricanizing the Negro’; Catholic catechesis remained ‘an illusion’.<sup>57</sup> He campaigned against police repression of Afro-Brazilian cults on the grounds that *candomblé* was a religion that corresponded to the level of development of the Negro. His commitment to research different aspects of Afro-Bahian culture resulted not only in precursor studies but also influenced a whole generation of younger scholars that continued his research. His appreciation of the different levels of popular religiosity had a long-lasting impact. Rodrigues distinguished between the ‘superior animism’ of the ‘Sudanese’ (Jeje and Yoruba) and the ‘narrow fetishism’ of the ‘most backward tribes’ (the ‘Bantus’ from Kongo/Angola). According to him, the Brazilian *mestiços*—many of which adopted the *candomblé de Angola* or *de caboclo*—had the same intellectual level as the Bantus.<sup>58</sup>

Artur Ramos (1903–1949), a bachelor of the Faculty of Medicine as well, continued and expanded Nina Rodrigues' work. He founded the Brazilian Society of Anthropology and Ethnology (1941) and promoted the study of race relations while director of the social science department of UNESCO in Paris. Although he did not take on board his master's anthropological theories, he was still indebted to evolutionism, in particular to the French scholar Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939). If Ramos no longer believed in the racial inferiority of the Negro, he was still convinced that blacks possessed a pre-logical mentality and an inferior culture, which was condemned to disappear.<sup>59</sup> Ramos among others propagated in Brazil the theories developed by US anthropologist Melville Herskovits (1895–1963), in particular his concept of acculturation. According to Herskovits, a situation of contact between two unequal cultures produced three different outcomes: acceptance, adaptation or reaction. Acceptance meant the culture of the colonizer was assimilated, resulting in the loss of the former culture. This, predicted Artur Ramos, was to be the final destination for the black groups in Brazil and elsewhere. Reaction designated the rejection of acculturation, resulting in the maintenance of the original cultures, as expressed in some counter-acculturative movements. Adaptation, the intermediate solution, was, according to Ramos, the most common result of the slaves' acculturation in the New World. 'The Black cultures combined with patterns of white culture, in a historical mosaic, where it is often difficult to recognize the original elements'.<sup>60</sup>

Even though Ramos treated elements of black culture as mere 'survivals', he considered not only religion but also folklore as 'royal avenues' that reveal the 'collective unconscious' of the Negro. His work on 'Negro Folklore' thus identified African 'totemic survivals' in Brazil, 'disguised' in the numerous manifestations of popular culture.<sup>61</sup> Ramos' mention of African combat games and dances such as the *cufunha* of the Lunda people inspired his friend and collaborator Carneiro to consider in 1936, for the first time, a direct African ancestor for capoeira—a suggestion unfortunately ignored by later scholars (see [Chapter 2](#)).<sup>62</sup>

The writer and journalist Edison Carneiro (1912–1972) is widely known for his work on Afro-Bahian religion and as a campaigner for the defence of Brazilian folklore. His precursor study of Bahian capoeira identified the art with the Angolas and recognized that capoeira incorporated 'fetichist elements' in the songs and rituals, a result of syncretism and adaption of originally religious meanings. Despite acknowledging the 'enormous vitality' of capoeira, Carneiro considered that the art, especially capoeira de Angola, was on its way to extinction.<sup>63</sup> This did not prevent him from actively promoting capoeira as an expression of black culture, and to fight for the decriminalization of its manifestations. Thus a capoeira performance was included in the programme of the Second Afro-Brazilian Congress he organized in Salvador in 1937 (see [Chapter 6](#)). From that moment capoeira started to be recognized as an important expression of ethnic identity, and more particularly as a marker of the Bantu contribution to Afro-Brazilian culture.

The study of Afro-Brazilian culture was profoundly altered from the 1940s onwards with the contribution of the French sociologist Roger Bastide (1898–1974). Bastide broke with the ethnocentric paradigm of earlier studies postulating the inferiority or the 'pre-logical' mentality of the Africans and Afro-Brazilians. Moving a way from the pathologizing approaches towards Afro-Brazilian religion, Bastide demonstrated the rationality of *candomblé* and trance. His work not only inspired a generation of scholars, but was also very popular among *candomblé* priests.<sup>64</sup> There is one aspect of his work, however, which perpetuated the distinction between a 'higher' West African (Jeje-Nagô) culture and a 'lower' Central African (Bantu) culture established by Nina Rodrigues. For Bastide the Nagô cult houses were committed to the maintenance of African traditions, whilst the *terreiros* identified with the Bantus (*candomblé de Angola* in Bahia, *macumba* in Rio de Janeiro) were more inclined to accept assimilation and syncretism. He thus lamented their 'disaggregation'. Bastide asserted that the Bantu contribution was more important in folklore than in



religion, supposedly because Angolan slaves were preferred for fieldwork and thus more numerous on plantations than in the cities. Capoeira de Angola and other Bantu dances figured, however, prominently among what Bastide called the ‘African’ (as opposed to the Negro and European-derived) folklore in the Americas. We also owe to him a pioneering attempt to compare capoeira with other combat games in the Caribbean.<sup>65</sup>

The reassessment of African roots in Bahia was not initiated by intellectuals alone, but reflected the growing vitality of the wider Afro-Bahian community and its ultimately successful strategy in facing repression.<sup>66</sup> The very idea of Nagô purity versus Bantu hybridity seems to have relied to a large extent on views prevailing among the priests of Nagô shrines.<sup>67</sup> Close personal relations linked the most traditionalist terreiros in Salvador to scholars such as Nina Rodrigues, Ramos, Carneiro, Bastide and Verger (who were all to some degree initiated and awarded honorary positions). This support certainly helped the most prestigious Nagô cult houses to escape police persecution and to obtain wider recognition in local society.

The discourse of Nagô purity became hegemonic after the 1930s and still lingers on in many quarters in Brazil. Its implications are however more ambiguous than one might think at first sight; indeed the idea of Nagô authenticity can also serve as a strategy of domination. The revaluation of one single African tradition can be instrumental in demoting the culture of the majority of blacks who followed other, in particular more syncretic manifestations, such as the *candomblés de caboclo*. The idea of Nagô purity was also used to legitimize the myth of the Brazilian ‘racial democracy’ and furthermore served the purpose of marketing the most exotic aspects of Afro-Bahian culture.<sup>68</sup>

### From ‘survivals’ to ‘extensions’: Afrocentric narratives

In October 1941, Renato Almeida gave a paper on the ‘Play of Capoeira’ at the Brazilian Society for Archaeology and Ethnology—probably the first academic seminar on the most famous Brazilian martial art. On that occasion, the distinguished North American Professor Melville J. Herskovits commented that he had seen similar combat games in Africa and in different locations in the Americas.<sup>69</sup> His observation, however, was to be ignored for several decades because it did not suit the nationalist discourse emphasizing the uniqueness of the Brazilian art. Equally ignored were local attempts to revitalize traditional capoeira in Bahia (see [Chapter 6](#)).

In contrast to nationalist Brazilian discourses, transatlantic approaches towards capoeira have only in recent times conquered greater public space. Because they have been marginalized from academic institutions and mainstream publishing until recently there is not the same density of material or even research. Afrocentric perspectives have provided an important critique of Brazilian nationalist claims regarding the origins and characteristics of capoeira over the last years. Even though they share some of the perspectives of discourses emphasizing the ethnic character of the art, they can also be quite distinct in their conclusions from the narratives we discussed so far. Some of them actively promote a pan-African agenda which impacts heavily on the way capoeira is perceived and re-appropriated.

In 1965, the Angolan artist Albano Neves e Sousa visited Brazil. His journey was part of a wider pursuit. Neves e Sousa aimed to document the multiple links between popular cultures of the Portuguese colonies in Africa and Brazil, anticipating thus the idea of a ‘Black Atlantic’. His drawings and comments point out similarities in the material culture (dwellings, food, clothes) and street festivals in Angola, Cabo Verde, Guiné Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Brazil. Neves e Sousa seems to have been particularly impressed by how Angolan Brazil still was. The epigraph to his work, published later in Angola, stated: ‘Let them say what they will...but if Portugal fathered Brazil, Angola was the Black Mother on whose lap the child grew.’<sup>70</sup>

In Salvador Neves e Souza visited the Axé Opó Afonjá shrine and also attended a ceremony at the *terreiro* directed by the wife of the famous capoeira Mestre Bimba. He went to Mestre Pastinha's capoeira Angola school too and drew a series of pictures of the septuagenarian teacher and his students.<sup>71</sup> Unfortunately no report seems to exist about the encounter of these two men, which was to have such an impact on the way capoeira origins were to be perceived.<sup>72</sup> Neves e Souza was struck by the similarity between capoeira movements and a dance of his native country, the *n'golo*. He thus propagated the idea that 'N'Golo, the Zebra Dance, is possibly the origin of the Capoeira, the fighting dance of Brazil'. He even (although rather unconvincingly) compared M.Pastinha to the *quimbanda* ('witch-doctor') Chipalanga, 'who rules over the "Efico" ceremonies in Mucope, and who therefore lays down the laws regarding the N'Golo dance.'<sup>73</sup> Neves e Sousa also corresponded with the outstanding Brazilian folklorist Luís da Câmara Cascudo (1898–1986), providing the later with more information about the rituals associated with the *n'golo*. Câmara Cascudo quoted extensively from this correspondence in his books about Brazilian folklore, and endorsed Neves e Souza's hypothesis.<sup>74</sup> Thus not only a renowned *mestre* of capoeira Angola, but also a leading Brazilian scholar started to defend the idea that capoeira might have its remote origins in the *n'golo* dance. Yet at this stage both the scholar and the *mestre* only considered it a possibility, not an established fact (see Chapter 6). Also, in institutional terms Cascudo held a rather marginalized position in the field of Brazilian folklore studies and thus his stance on capoeira origins did initially not have that much impact.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, in times of harsh repression of 'non Brazilian ideas' by the military regime, few wanted to openly challenge the Brazilian character of capoeira.

Meanwhile, the idea of Nagô purity versus Bantu lack of tradition also came under attack in other quarters. Inspired by Herskovits' work on 'African survivals' in the Americas, by their own exposure to the vitality of African culture in the diaspora and the growing strength of the Black Movement in the US and elsewhere, a range of scholars undertook research on more specific aspects of African or African-derived culture on both sides of the Atlantic. Since the 1970s, Robert Farris Thompson pursued his project of 'identifying specifically Yoruba, Kongo, Dahomean, Mande, and Ejagham influences on the art and philosophies of black people throughout the Americas'. His piece on the Bakongo identified Kongo symbolic patterns in ground-drawings, charms or burial grounds in the African American Diaspora. He shows for instance that the cross, far from constituting an evidence for Christian influence, is also a key element in Kongo cosmology.<sup>76</sup> His work has influenced and inspired a range of younger US scholars working on related topics, including capoeira. The ethnomusicologist Gerhard Kubik highlighted concrete traits of Angolan culture in Brazil, showing the continuity of rhythmic patterns, instruments, dances and games, among them capoeira. He challenged the assumption that Afro-Brazilian music had to be understood in terms of 'acculturation', which merely identified African 'roots' for contemporary manifestations. He suggested that Afro-American music should be seen instead as 'a consequent and creative extension overseas of African musical cultures'.<sup>77</sup>

When the Black Movement re-emerged in Brazil, during the 1980s, its militants turned towards Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions such as capoeira in their search for a black alternative to hegemonic Western, Eurocentric values. Julio César de Souza Tavares defended the first academic thesis on capoeira at the University of Brasília, in 1984. He argued that capoeira constituted a 'bodily archive' of slaves and their descendants, and characterized it as

[...] an expression of sociocultural resistance, as a counter-power to the dominant logic universe of slave society. And, residually, capoeira is a characteristic of Afro-Brazilianness, a non-verbal repertoire of communication, a bodily-gestured channel of communication, a gesticulated bricolage, and the condensation of a bodily knowledge from an African matrix.<sup>78</sup>



Militants from the Brazilian Black Movement (Movimento Negro) often sought inspiration and advice from the more established US groups. Brazilian groups, in return, attracted growing interest among black US militants, and as a result contacts were established and links intensified. Precisely at that time—the 1980s—Capoeira Angola was being revitalized in Brazil (see [Chapter 7](#)), and its practitioners started to put forward more explicitly the idea that capoeira, and in particular the Angola style, stood for African identity. One of the core groups in this process, the Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho (GCAP), regarded their art as an expression of African culture and the continuation of a Bantu practice. That was still a provocative statement in the authoritarian context of the 1980s, making it necessary for the group leader, M.Moraes, to issue a disclaimer:

Defending the African-ness of capoeira does not mean that the GCAP is involved in any movement of segregation, as some people tend to believe, but rather to call the attention of a part of society which still persists in spreading the idea that capoeira is a genuine Brazilian manifestation, without taking into consideration that the African black made a great contribution to our cultural formation.<sup>79</sup>

Many other capoeira groups, even those practising less traditionalist styles, started to make widespread use of terms and imagery associated with Kongo/Angola such as the zebra. In contrast with earlier denigrations, Bantu and Angola were now reclaimed as positive symbols, metaphors for tradition. In the United States, an exhibition hosted by the Caribbean Cultural Center in New York in 1991 was an important step in that direction. Highlighting that ‘Kongo-Angola culture from Central Africa is one of the most dynamic and pervasive forces in world culture’, its organizers explained:

In the Americas everyone practices some aspects of these Central African traditions in their daily lives, but without recognizing these activities as having a Kongo-Angola origin. For example, rumba, tango and samba, to name just three dances, are viewed in their respective countries as national dances. In reality, these dances should be understood as Central African movement forms shared with the world through their countries.<sup>80</sup>

In recent years, a number of scholars have sought to provide further evidence for these claims, showing the intensity and complexity of transatlantic links in the African diaspora and more generally the Atlantic world.<sup>81</sup>

With the globalization of capoeira, especially its expansion into the United States, Afrocentric scholars and militants discovered capoeira as an appropriate tool to foster racial or diasporic consciousness among African Americans. In fact some militants, (scholars or capoeira adepts) significantly contributed not only to the diffusion of the more traditionalist capoeira Angola style in the United States, but also participated in the elaboration of the angoleiro agenda in organizations such as GCAP.

In its broadest meaning, Afrocentrism stands for ‘an emphasis on shared African origins among all “black” people, taking a pride in those origins and an interest in African history and culture—or those aspects of New World cultures seen as representing African “survivals”—and a belief that Eurocentric bias has blocked or distorted knowledge of Africans and their cultures’.<sup>82</sup> In that respect Afrocentric approaches provide an important corrective of predominant, Eurocentric views about the African contribution to the culture of the Americas, and in particular, of the so far hegemonic Brazilian nationalist discourse about capoeira. Afrocentric interest in transatlantic links for instance contributed to replace capoeira in its wider context and to rethink anew its relationship with other combat games of the diaspora, usually downplayed or even completely negated by nationalist discourses that insist on its uniqueness and Brazilian-ness.

A more Africa-centred perspective has also help to highlight some important links and continuities between contemporary capoeira practice and Kongo/Angolan rituals and cosmology (see Chapters 2 and 7) and also stimulated some new and original research on African combat games and the possible origins of capoeira, such as the work by T.J.Desch-Obi, who maintains that capoeira and other African American martial arts constitute ‘living African traditions in the Americas’.<sup>83</sup>

The anxiety to prove African continuities or capoeira’s Angolan origins, however, ended up inducing a number of scholars to neglect some elementary rules of academic research, such as the respect for the statements made by the original sources. For some, Kongo/Angola has now become the mythical home of all martial arts of the diaspora, to the point that these writers should be qualified Kongo—rather than Afrocentric. Robert Farris Thompson, in his otherwise groundbreaking article on black martial arts of the Caribbean, for example asserts that

The Kongo presence in the development of Afro-Cuban *maní* and *bambosa* in the nineteenth-century dance-battles of Cuban blacks is manifest. According to Fernando Ortiz [...] every game began with a chant in creolized Ki-Kongo. Two men battled to the beat of Kongo-derived drums called *yuka*.<sup>84</sup>

Unfortunately Ortiz never wrote that, since he was convinced that *maní* came from West Africa. He only stated that the chants were sometimes in an *African* language, but usually in Creole and reproduced one African chant whose origin he could not identify. Moreover, Ortiz only described the drums as vertical, cylindric, made of avocado trunk, but did not call them *yuka* nor ascribed them a Kongo origin. In fact, based on interviews with practitioners and his intimate knowledge of all things Afro-Cuban, the eminent scholar explicitly attributed the origins of the *maní* combat game to the Gangá, more particularly the Gangá Maní. Ortiz related that ethnic group to either the Mandinga or the Ewe—in both cases West Africa and clearly not Central Africa. Current Cuban anthropology also locates the Gangá in contemporary Sierra Leone.<sup>85</sup> As this example shows, to assume ‘Kongo-centric’ predispositions without adequate methodology can lead to misinterpretation—if not outright manipulation—of original sources.<sup>86</sup>

More recent academic research in the United States has suffered from similar ‘Kongo-centric’ bias. T.J.Desch-Obi for instance emphatically asserts that the teacher of the late Bimba was from Angola, when all primary sources in Brazil refer to that little known character only as ‘African’ (see Chapter 5). Desch-Obi furthermore affirms that during the nineteenth century capoeira was called *engolo* in Brazil, and that M.Pastinha ‘stated clearly’ that his instructor Benedito ‘taught him that *capoeira* came from the *engolo* dance’.<sup>87</sup> To suggest there is evidence where there is none, is in my view, totally inappropriate to advance further in what is an important discussion. This kind of unsubstantiated statement, not borne out by any serious evidence, might seem useful to reinforce the point about the Angolan character of capoeira. Yet in the long run it will be counterproductive, since it contributes to discrediting the Afrocentric approach and hinders a deeper understanding of capoeira history. There are sufficient facts to corroborate the Angolan origins of capoeira—we do not need to invent any.

Prominent among contemporary Afrocentrists in this narrow meaning is Molefi Asante, who asserts ‘the natural, psychic and spiritual unity of all people of African descent around a set of principles supposedly derived from ancient Egypt’.<sup>88</sup> He teaches at Temple University, where his discipline of ‘Africology’ is now well established. His wife and colleague Kariamua Welsh Asante has identified seven ‘aesthetic senses’ (polyrhythm, polycentrism, curvilinear, dimensional, epic memory, repetition, and holism) in what she defines as ‘African dance’, based on the analysis of a range of dances in the diaspora, among which samba and capoeira. In other words, she extracts the ‘African’ from what is already diasporic. In a PhD thesis supervised by Molefi and Kariamua Asante, Kenneth Dossar took these seven ‘aesthetic senses’ as a point of

departure. He established, unsurprisingly, that these are all present in capoeira Angola, which can therefore be identified as an 'African art form'.<sup>89</sup> At this level academic 'research' on capoeira history becomes tautological and confined to the mere reiteration of myths.

For these defenders of 'wild' Afrocentrism, it is important not only to highlight the African character of capoeira, but also to downplay the transformations the art might have undergone in Brazil. In its most extreme formulation, capoeira thus appears as an entirely African manifestation, taken by Angolan slaves to Brazil, rescued in the 1980s and now spreading among African Americans of the diaspora (see the Nardi quote at beginning of this chapter). In that view, black US citizens have thus more legitimate claims regarding the 'property' of capoeira than white, middle-class Brazilians who only contributed to 'de-characterizing' the original art. Needless to say that this clashes frontally with what many Brazilians think about capoeira. Ultimately this is a struggle over which group is more 'entitled' to re-appropriate capoeira: diasporic blackness or Brazilian national identity. Although these master narratives appear totally incompatible, I would argue that an examination of the issue of creolization in capoeira can provide a middle ground for a more consensual narrative.

Just as the Eurocentric or Brazilian nationalist discourses, in opposition to which it tends to define itself, the Afrocentric narrative can equally become one-sided in its approach. The over-emphasis on capoeira's African-ness tends to essentialize history into binary categories opposing, for example, good Africans and bad Europeans. It also tends to homogenize the continent and freeze its culture in a pre-modern and non-Western state of authenticity. Culture is perceived in terms of biological analogies and fixed geographical locations, paradoxically reproducing the same underlying grammar of the colonialist discourse. The negative sign attributed to all things African is inverted, but it runs the risk of reinstating old discourses under the same premises and falling into analogous essentialisms. The extreme Afrocentric narrative depends thus more than it would like to admit on the discourses it wants to reject to maintain its consistency. This view also depends on a notion of culture as static, referring it always to 'authentic' roots that lie in the past, regarding purity as more relevant than transformations. As culture here also has much to do with identity formations, essentialist views, independently of where they are located, it will tend to be more exclusive than inclusive.

Essentialism of all kinds easily leads to fundamentalism. For the same reason many white supremacists condemned (and still condemn) miscegenation; fundamentalist Afrocentrics have only contempt for hybridity, perceived as intrinsically negative. In that more restricted meaning Afrocentrism stands for an ideology of extreme cultural nationalism, 'accompanied by a mass of invented traditions, by a mythical vision of the past, and by a body of racial pseudoscience'.<sup>90</sup> It has reached its most extreme formulations in the contemporary, pseudoscientific melanin narratives promoting the idea of black superiority.<sup>91</sup>

Another approach, as suggested for instance by James Clifford, opens a different venue to think these processes:

If we rethink culture and its science, anthropology, in terms of travel, then the organic, naturalizing bias of the term culture—seen as a rooted body that grows, lives, dies, etc.—is questioned. Constructed and disputed historicities, sites of displacements, interference, and interaction, come more sharply into view.<sup>92</sup>

This shift of the notion of culture from the 'naturalizing bias' to the metaphor of travel is the more relevant when studying diasporic cultures, as their very origin lies in the journey, in the historical experience of displacement and uprooted-ness. Stuart Hall points out that

[...] the diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of “identity” which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*.

He highlights that black Caribbean identities are framed by two vectors, which are ‘simultaneously operative: the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture’.<sup>93</sup> These reflections can be extended to many other cultural formations of the diaspora. It is precisely this dialectic of continuity and rupture that is ignored by the fundamentalist Afrocentrics; their emphasis is always on the continuities. Whilst I agree with Afrocentric scholars that capoeira undoubtedly has African origins that extend into contemporary practice, and which have been largely ignored due to Eurocentric or ‘Tupicentric’ prejudices, I do not share their belief that contemporary capoeira is, above all an ‘extension’ of a single African manifestation (*n’golo*). This view reposes on outdated diffusionism and a reified view of culture.<sup>94</sup>

### Regional, corporate and class discourses

Conflicts over the meaning of contemporary capoeira are by no means restricted to the binary opposition between the Afrocentric and Brazilian nationalist views I have emphasized so far. A number of other discourses intersect with them thus contributing to complicate further the analysis of competing narratives. Conflicts regarding the history of capoeira also reflect struggles over regional pro-eminence within Brazil. During the nineteenth century the Northeastern economy based on sugar cane performed less well than the coffee in the Southeast. The gap widened during the twentieth century and resulted in the region being perceived as backward and underdeveloped compared to the South and the Southeast. The economic underperformance was followed by the loss of political influence at federal level. The 1930 revolution imposed non-elected governors (interventores)—often from the South—in states that had formerly claimed national pro-eminence, such as Bahia and Pernambuco. The loss of regional autonomy encouraged the renaissance of regionalism in the Northeast during the 1920–1930s. Intellectuals and artists, among which Gilberto Freyre, claimed that the Northeast was the ‘true’ Brazil, as opposed to the South, submerged by ‘foreign’ influences. The claim to greater authenticity was to a certain extent endorsed by the regime and other opinion makers, and found its way into the set of common assumptions shared by Brazilians. Since the 1940s Carnival songs in Rio thus exalted Bahia as the birthplace of Brazilian culture. The afore mentioned discourse of Nagô superiority also overlapped with a regionalist discourse of Bahian purity, as opposed to Cariocan and Bantu hybridity, since more slaves from Kongo/Angola were deported to Rio de Janeiro, where they always constituted a clear majority.<sup>95</sup>

At the same time, however, a strong competition developed between Rio de Janeiro and Bahia over cultural pro-eminence. Capoeira constitutes, along side other manifestations such as carnival, just another field where this inter-regional conflict is played out. The way the history of capoeira is told changes considerably according to a Bahian, Cariocan or Pernambucan perspective. Cariocans for instance tend to emphasize the continuity of capoeira in their city despite the harsh repression of the 1890s, highlight the contribution of capoeira reformers from Rio in the first decades of the twentieth century, and underscore the importance of Rio for the spreading of the art from the 1960s onwards. Bahians on the contrary tend to paint capoeira from Salvador as the only relevant form for the emergence of modern styles and insist the distinction between Regional and Angola is fundamental to understand contemporary capoeira. Capoeiristas from Rio or São Paulo, in contrast, often dismiss that distinction as no longer relevant given the contemporary fusion between both styles. Thus to identify specific groups as Angola or Regional means, to a certain extent,

already adopting a Bahian perspective, acknowledging Bahian hegemony over actual capoeira forms, whilst adepts from the Southeast often prefer to label their style as 'contemporary capoeira'.<sup>96</sup>

Different class and professional backgrounds further complicate the way the history of capoeira is told. The modernization of capoeira has resulted in a multiplication of specialist discourses. Doctors, psychologists, social scientists, administrators and sports teachers all comment on its practice, and try to intervene through a variety of means. If the labour market for capoeira teachers has expanded enormously in the last two decades, so has the competition between teachers. Many teachers who learned in the traditional way from an old *mestre*, but who might not have achieved a formal education, feel threatened by instructors who take degrees in physical education at Brazilian universities (whose curricula now include capoeira). In this sense, myths like the burning of all archives reinforces the legitimacy of oral tradition, transmitted through the traditional relationship between *mestre* and disciple. It precludes the falsification of the *mestre*'s teachings through the use of other sources and reinforces the initiatory aspect of capoeira apprenticeship. This 'corporate' discourse occasionally assumes an anti-academic posture, because of the contradictions between the 'foundations' of capoeira and new 'scientific' evidence from sports sciences. A 'traditional capoeira class does not necessarily conform to the latest teachings of physical education. *Mestres* who want to preserve their teaching method are thus cornered into a defensive position, because they are only too well aware that these new contributions can constitute a potential challenge for them, devaluating their symbolic capital.

If old *mestres* share therefore common interests as the guardians of tradition against outsiders, they do not necessarily coincide in their views about the history of capoeira. Vehement disagreements result less from different interpretations over the distant past, than from about their own role in recent history. Many claim primacy in some achievement regarding the diffusion of capoeira, and inevitably their assertions clash with claims from other *mestres*. Conflicts also arise over a common and long dead *mestre*, when competing disciples claim to be the authentic defenders of his heritage. Often they challenge to what extent other, rival students 'really' learned from him. In that respect all interviews with old *mestres*, albeit an crucial element for the reconstruction of capoeira's more recent past, are nevertheless as biased as any written, 'outsider' source, if only for different reasons. Furthermore, many students of capoeira history seem to ignore the problem of 'feedback' in the *mestres*' narratives. As with everybody else, their discourse changes over time, according to shifts in their world views and to the new developments of the art. Any new information is processed and integrated into their current interpretation. It is thus methodologically unsound to expect them to separate neatly the knowledge they received through oral tradition from the information gathered through other means. For instance, no *mestre* ever mentioned *n'golo* prior to Neves e Souza's visit to Brazil and Câmara Cascudo's publications, and it is therefore fallacious to use later interviews, where *mestres* reflect over that important new element, as 'evidence' of a genuine oral tradition remembering the distant capoeira origins.

As we are going to see in more detail, the relationship between class and capoeira practice has become increasingly intricate, as styles spread from their original constituencies to much larger audiences. Despite this complex picture, another master narrative tends to read capoeira history as essentially overlapping with class struggle. Analogous to ethnic or Afrocentric discourses, capoeira is constructed by the class discourse as a synonym of resistance, but the 'African' or 'black' is substituted by the 'people'. Its rational basis lies in the fact that capoeira indeed constituted a counter-hegemonic practice in a variety of historical contexts. The class discourse emphasizes these struggles and suggests that capoeira practice 'is', intrinsically, 'resistance', or 'gymnastics of resistance'.<sup>97</sup> Although the re-appropriation of capoeira from the 1930s onwards is usually recognized, there is a trend to minimize the involvement of upper-class males and the links forged between capoeira gangs and politicians during the 'golden age' of the art. The exploitation

women suffered from male capoeiras and any other aspect that questions the ‘resistance’ aspect of the art are not problematized. Positive contributions by middle-class practitioners to rescue the art are equally dismissed.

The fundamental differences between these master narratives can explain heated controversies over issues that might seem of secondary importance to outsiders. The origin of the term capoeira, for instance, gave rise to lengthy polemics since the 1920s, with scholars and practitioners defending alternatively a Tupi (native Brazilian), Portuguese or African origin of the term.<sup>98</sup> I believe that only by placing these never ending debates into that broader context of competing master narratives does the rationale of these struggles become clear.

As we have seen, each master narrative makes extensive use of myths and, eventually, even of fakes. This does not mean that their overall objective is not legitimate to some degree. Creation or ‘foundational’ myths seem central to the forging of identities of all kinds of organizations. Essentialism of one kind or the other seems to be inherent to all emerging social or national movements. To aggregate as large as possible an audience, demands are organized around an a-historical essence that needs to be ‘restored’. In a second moment, however, essentialist claims which gloss over contradictions are reconsidered as these become, through the very dynamic of the movement, more apparent. The deconstruction of ‘essences’ thus constitutes a necessary supplement to essentialism with which it entertains a dialectic relationship.<sup>99</sup> ‘In identifying mythical elements in our own cultural or professional assumptions, we threaten our ethnocentric self-confidence’.<sup>100</sup> The critique of essentialism is furthermore crucial in the struggle against fundamentalism of all sorts, be it ethnical absolutism, national narrowness or neo-liberal commodification. That is why I believe it is important to show that capoeira is a prime example of a ‘counterculture of modernity’, a ‘transcultural, international formation’ of the Black Atlantic rather than only African or Brazilian.<sup>101</sup>

The challenge is how to integrate these different perspectives into a more encompassing one, which does justice to the legitimate aspirations of each master narrative—the affirmation of Brazilian or diasporic African identity or the struggle against social exclusion in a world dominated by cultural imperialism and corporate interests. As a historian, I believe that the critique of sources is valid across cultural differences and constitutes therefore a common ground on which to build such an interpretation.<sup>102</sup> In other words, despite different working hypotheses of each individual scholar, solid evidence tested by historical methods should provide the means to advance in our search to understand better the development of capoeira. This obviously excludes faking sources and facts, but means to be able to revise our assumptions should new evidence require us to do so.

Fortunately, the dialogue between capoeira *mestres*, scholars, practitioners and the wider public is already happening. Around the world, the history of capoeira is being debated in journals, seminars and capoeira encounters. The growing importance of ‘virtual *rodas*’ on the internet also reflects the intensity of actual discussions.<sup>103</sup> Positions are often less rigid and subtle than the essentialist narratives I have presented here. Almost every month new research enriches our understanding of capoeira history. It is from this ever growing mass of information that I have tried to summarize the history that follows.



## Capoeira in the context of the Black Atlantic

Despite controversies over the remote ‘roots’ of capoeira, and over what constitutes its ‘essence’, no one actually doubts that the art in its present form developed out of the Brazilian context of colonial slave culture. The contentious issue of capoeira origins can be placed in a broader, comparative perspective by conceiving it as neither Brazilian nor African but rather as a transatlantic, creole development. The first section of this chapter will thus introduce the reader to the controversial issue of creolization, and then briefly examine the formation of slave, Afro-Brazilian and popular culture in Brazil. In order to explain cultural continuity and change, I will focus first on the question of slave identity and the emergence of African-derived nations in the Americas, and then look at some core manifestations of African, slave and popular culture in Brazil. Afro-Brazilian religion (*candomblé*) and diversions (*batuque*) developed through intense cultural circulation between various socio-ethnic groups whilst at the same time playing a core role in the constitution of neo-African identities. My aim is to identify these complementary and even contradictory aspects in the formation of Brazilian popular culture, which are best subsumed under the term creolization. Creolization—in the wider meaning I am using here—entails processes of both fusion and segmentation, as well as the relocation of particular practices in new contexts and more encompassing manifestations. This discussion will help us to assess the creole features of capoeira and to consider what complementary relationship it maintained with other cultural practices.

The second section will look at fighting techniques and combat games that developed on both sides of the Black Atlantic. A discussion of the available information regarding historical forms will allow us to judge the claim that capoeira constitutes an ‘extension’ of one single African martial art. Highlighting similarities and differences with forms that developed elsewhere in the diaspora, in particular in the Caribbean, will help us to appreciate better the formation of Brazilian capoeira. Locating capoeira within both the context of martial arts in the diaspora and of wider Brazilian popular culture reveals the intense processes of borrowing, re-invention and circulation through which the art emerged. This exploration into capoeira’s broader context will also allow a better assessment of subsequent changes in formal aspects, social context and the cultural meaning of the art.

### African, slave and popular culture

The academic debate over the origins of slave culture has a long history, and is closely linked to identity politics in the Black Atlantic. Already during the 1940s the US anthropologists E. Franklin Frazier and Melville Herskovits exchanged arguments regarding the importance of the African heritage in the Americas. According to Frazier, slaves had been stripped of their culture to the point that their African past had been reduced to ‘forgotten memories’. Thus, in the view of Frazier and his followers, slave culture would mainly be the result of a situation of oppression and the slaves’ adaptation to it. Herskovits, on the contrary, insisted



on the common cultural traits supposedly shared by slaves from different parts of Africa.<sup>1</sup> He believed that motor habits, aesthetic patterns, or value systems, lying below the level of consciousness were retained by Africans in the New World and made significant contributions to Afro-American culture.<sup>2</sup> As we shall see, these common cultural traits are difficult to establish for cultures that have long disappeared or changed considerably over time. We should therefore not be surprised that there is still no overall consensus regarding the unity or the heterogeneity of African civilization(s).

If there is disagreement over what constituted the slaves' original cultures, and what they were able to bring along with them on the Middle Passage, an even bigger controversy dividing scholars concerns the process through which slaves became part of plantation societies in the Americas. How did slaves use the materials at their disposal in a new environment? No doubt, slaves had to adapt their cultural practices to the many constraints of slavery. Whilst nobody denies the necessity of adaptations for the sake of survival, it is the very character of that process that still constitutes the bone of contention. Even Herskovits acknowledged that 'borrowing' from African cultures was never achieved without significant change. Because slaves were not only uprooted from their homelands but also separated from their families and kin, Sidney Mintz and Richard Price in their classic study on the topic insisted that the deported Africans did not compose structured *groups*, but that one should rather view them as heterogeneous *crowds*.<sup>3</sup> To form again a community in the Americas, slaves had therefore to go through a process of intense cultural change. Mintz and Price did not deny the importance of African input but insisted that 'neither social context nor cultural traditions alone can explain an African-American institutional form and that the development of institutions must be viewed in their full historical setting'. They concluded that 'formal continuities from Africa are more the exception than the rule in any African-American culture' and that 'borrowing may not best express the reality at all—"creating" or "remodelling" may be more precise'.<sup>4</sup>

Critiques of Mintz and Price have pointed out that their analysis—commonly referred to as the 'creolization model'—sees the problem too much from an American perspective, underplays the importance of African continuities and therefore 'has too many exceptions to carry much weight'.<sup>5</sup> Recent studies have emphasized the continuity of African ethnicities well beyond the first generation in the Americas.<sup>6</sup> The role of the first generation has also been re-assessed. Whilst Mintz and Price underlined the importance of the 'charter' generation, and thus their particular cultural background and experience, for the establishment of an early creole culture that provided the matrix for later developments, new research has shown that there was not always a linear evolution from 'African' into 'creole'. Ira Berlin for instance demonstrated how first generations of 'Atlantic creoles', familiarized with European culture, were swamped by later generations of slaves from less acculturated African backgrounds.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the issue is how are we to characterize slave culture: as an assimilation to and an adaptation of the master's culture, as a 'retention' or even an 'extension' of their own African cultures or as a creative 're-invention' using elements of both?

If new research has contributed significantly to a better understanding of the complexity of cultural change in the Black Atlantic, it does not invalidate the basic argument that fusion did occur between heterogeneous traditions, be it between different African cultures or between these and European and Native American cultures.<sup>8</sup> Scholars have used a range of terms (acculturation, hybridization, transculturation, creolization, syncretism, etc.) to describe this transformation. In my view creolization is still the best suited category to analyse cultural change, since it does not—unlike hybridity—suggest a biological heritage or a 'miscegenation'; it rather implies that change is acquired during a socialization process. It also is more specific than acculturation and does not imply a passive adaptation. Creole is derived from the Portuguese *criar* ('to nurse') and said to have originated among the Portuguese-dominated trade on the West African coast.<sup>9</sup>

In their zeal to show the irrelevance of African traditions, Eurocentric or 'America-centric' scholars have often ignored important commonalities amongst the African slaves. In terms of music, for example, West and Central Africa were not characterized by 'mutually exclusive traditions or style clusters', but rather by 'a network of overlapping styles which share common features of structure, basic procedures, and similar contextual relations'.<sup>10</sup> This allowed for significant continuities in Afro-American music and dance. Afrocentric writers on the other hand, eager to prove the extent of continuities between African and Afro-American cultures, have disregarded the ruptures, and overlooked the mechanisms captives used to compensate for the loss of traditions. Too much insistence on smooth cultural continuities can lead one to underestimate the brutality of slavery and to rehabilitate the institution. These debates show that we need to ask more precise questions about the continuity of traditions as well as the moments of rupture. We need to distinguish between contradictory processes of fusion and acculturation on one side, and segmentation and juxtaposition on the other. We need to ask what aspects were more likely to change and how representative a particular cultural manifestation was in its original context. We need to look at developments from African, as well as European and American perspectives.

Before examining slave culture in Brazil it is necessary to introduce the reader to two issues crucial for the examination of capoeira formation in its wider, transatlantic context: the degree of diversity of African cultures and societies from which slaves were abducted; and the redefinition of ethnic boundaries and the emergence of new, African-derived 'nations' in the Americas.

### *African nations and slave identity*

Colonialism and slavery deeply marked Western views about Africa and its people in the diaspora. As a result, a number of prejudices and stereotypes affect common perceptions of African, slave, and Afro-American culture even today. Africa has for centuries been the privileged site for the location of 'barbarism' and 'savagery'.<sup>11</sup> These conceptions, developed during the centuries of the slave trade, were systematized in the Age of Enlightenment and resulted in the formulation of racial theories about 'Negro' inferiority in the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> They guided and legitimated the colonial policies of European powers until African nations acquired independence in the second half of the twentieth century.

Decades after formal political independence, the decolonization of African history still seems incomplete. Even reformed, contemporary visions of Africa in the West often perpetuate gross misconceptions. One common stereotype is the idea that Africa is home to 'traditional', 'tribal' cultures, whose 'authentic values' have remained unchanged over centuries. These clichés and the racialized politics they inspired have in turn resulted in modern African revivalists, especially in the US, often borrowing elements from these racial stereotypes to challenge white supremacists.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the historicity of African societies is often denied or ignored, in order to make a return to an 'essential' Africa possible for the people in the diaspora. In reality, though, deep changes affected African societies from the time of the first contact with Europeans until the end of the slave trade and thereafter. This process transformed not only the social structure, the forms of political organization, the techniques used in production or warfare, but also entertainment, aesthetics and religion. This might be obvious for anybody more acquainted with African history or society, but unfortunately it is far from constituting common knowledge among the large community of capoeira practitioners, whose understanding of Africa often relies on the old stereotypes still transmitted by secondary schools in Brazil and elsewhere. Even though new scholarship allows us to question simplistic views of the African past, we still lack many elements that would allow us a deeper understanding of the complexity of cultural change that affected slaves and their descendants in the Americas. Moreover, if academics have produced a major revision of African history over the last decades, they have not painted a

homogenous picture but rather engaged in heated controversies inspired by and linked to the political agendas discussed in the previous chapter.

Whilst much of the older literature emphasized the heterogeneity of African societies, which supposedly prevented the preservation of African cultural traits,<sup>14</sup> another line of historiography, postulated, on the contrary, that all slaves deported to the Americas, or at least those originating from one major region, did share a single cultural heritage. Melville Herskovits prominently defended the idea of West Africa as one 'culture area'. All societies in this macro-region supposedly shared a wide range of cultural traits such as patrilocality or corporate ownership of land, an assumption that has to some extent been proven inaccurate.<sup>15</sup> Later scholars have thus sought to refine that kind of approach. J. Thornton, for instance, reconfigured Herskovits' cultural zones in his work on the Africans in the Atlantic world. Adopting the classic distinction between three macro-regions from where slaves were deported into the Americas—Upper Guinea, Lower Guinea and the Angola coast—he combined linguistic, economic and political criteria, and subdivided these main areas further into seven distinct sub-regions. According to Thornton, within these sub-regions language, economics or politics created a minimum of homogeneity that allows conceiving each of them as a distinct subculture.<sup>16</sup>

Even though his scheme has been criticized for West Africa,<sup>17</sup> his point certainly remains valid for the Angola coast, also referred to as the Kongo/Angola region or West Central Africa. Almost all native peoples in that macro-region spoke—with few exceptions—Western Bantu languages. Furthermore, many of the inhabitants on the Angolan coast communicated in either Kikongo or Kimbundu. Since those two main languages were, in the sixteenth century, 'as linguistically similar as Spanish and Portuguese', Kikongo and Kimbundu speakers were able to establish communication without resorting to a colonial language.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to Upper and Lower Guinea, Kongo/Angola was thus characterized by greater linguistic homogeneity.

Communications between slaves of different ethnic backgrounds were further facilitated by the fact that many inhabitants of West and Central Africa, especially in crossroads regions, spoke several languages. Trade and the expansion of kingdoms fostered the transformation of some languages into lingua francas, such as the Mandinga in Upper Guinea. Similarly, Yoruba was sometimes referred to as the 'general language' of Mina. Moreover, creole languages developed not only in the Americas, but also on the African coast, creating further possibilities of communication among captives. The existence of multilingualism, lingua francas and the similarity between related languages therefore questions the view of slaves from different ethnic groups unable to talk to each other. These features, on the contrary, allowed slaves coming from the same sub-region or even from one of the three main areas to communicate with each other. Long periods of time spent in ports or on the slave ships further increased the possibilities of language apprenticeship and interaction. The slave trade itself thus contributed to the redrawing of ethnic boundaries among captives well before they had even touched American soil.

Without trying to make inadequate generalizations about African political systems, one can, nevertheless, for the sole purpose of discussing slave origins and their 'nations' in the Americas, acknowledge that two levels of statehood frequently combined in both West Africa and on the Angolan coast. Around the Bight of Benin, for instance, hundreds of territories—usually a town with its hinterland or a group of villages—were ruled by an *oba*, a sacred king who enjoyed relative or even total autonomy.<sup>19</sup> Most of those mini-states however became tributaries of larger units, such as the kingdoms of Ketu, Ijesha, Oyó, Ijebu or Benin. In similar ways, many of the local rulers (*sobas*) on the Angolan coast were subdued to larger states, the most prominent of them being the kingdoms of Kongo and Ndongo (and later Portuguese Angola).<sup>20</sup> As a result, the captives embarked on the middle passage could identify either with their smaller, local territory or with the more encompassing regional political structure to which they had also been subjected.

In the religious domain structural similarity often characterized belief systems within one major cultural area. In Lower Guinea, for instance, the Gbe-speaking Aja, Fon and Ewe and the people speaking related Yoruba dialects in the Bight of Benin (who became, respectively, the Jeje and the Nagô in Brazil) shared the cult of ancestor monarchs and other rituals. It is, however, equally important to acknowledge the existing religious heterogeneity within the same subzone. Various religious traditions entertained conflictual relationships in many areas of Africa at the time of the slave trade. Even materialist conceptions existed in some societies.<sup>21</sup> Islam in West Africa and Christendom in the kingdom of Kongo and in Portuguese Angola tended to displace 'traditional' religions, but also absorbed many of their features, constituting new, original fusions in Africa, long before African slaves were 'seasoned' in the Americas.

Because language, religion and statehood did, as a rule, not overlap, slave merchants did not ascribe the origin of their captives—the 'nation' in the language of the time—in consistent ways. Slaves themselves also adopted various identities according to the context. The complexity of African societies thus made the construction of slave identity in the Americas an intricate process, and the changing patterns of the slave trade and ethnic dispersal over the New World further complicated the picture. Slave traders classified their human cargo according to their 'nation' because that supposedly gave buyers a better idea of the merchandise they were acquiring. Over time particular stereotypes developed, based on European prejudices but also on the pragmatic experiences of slave traders and plantation owners. Thus slaves from each African 'nation' were attributed a set of fixed characteristics, for instance of being particularly inclined to rebellion or, on the contrary, being very docile, hard working or lazy, inclined to practise witchcraft or prone to commit suicide.

Captives were thus classified according to various and contradictory criteria: their port of embarkation in Africa, the macro-region they came from, the state to which they had been subjected prior to their transatlantic crossing, the language they spoke or the particular ethnic group they belonged to. Each system of classification was far from consistent, however, due to the trader's ignorance of the slaves' specific backgrounds, and the intricacy of African ethnic identities and political structures. For that reason indications of slave origins in historical documents are frequently vague and often unreliable. A slave sold as being 'from the Guinea Coast', for example, did not refer to any specific ethnicity or state, but referred loosely to the West African coast.<sup>22</sup>

Often the port of embarkation became a key marker of slave identity. Mina slaves for instance designated those embarked from the Portuguese factory of El-Mina in present day Ghana and, by extension, other ports of the region such as Whydah. They could be of very diverse ethnic origins. After the establishment of Portuguese colonies in Luanda and Benguela, slaves traded from those ports were usually referred to as 'Angolas' and 'Benguelas', despite the fact that many did not come from the Portuguese colonies themselves, but rather from neighbouring territories or states located much further inland, such as the Lunda Empire. Thus slaves from the same ethnic background—for instance Ganguelas—could end up being qualified as either 'Angola' or 'Benguela', according to the slave-trading network that had abducted them. Kongo, albeit the name of a kingdom at the time, also designated a river and a wider region, so there are similar doubts about the precise ethnic identity of 'Congo' slaves.<sup>23</sup> The Ketu, Ijesha or Ijebu nations, on the contrary, referred to more precise West African territories and political boundaries, since they stood for some of the states in the Bight of Benin from which slaves originated. However, slaves from these kingdoms all spoke related dialects, and therefore could also be classified under the more general denomination Nagô, which was used in Brazil for all speakers of what became, in Africa, the Yoruba language.<sup>24</sup>

The indiscriminate use of these different criteria to define the slaves' 'nation' makes the latter not a very reliable category for the analysis of an original African ethnic identity. Moreover, frequent changes in the political structure—some states expanding at the benefit of others, and eventually subjecting them—meant

that the definition of many African 'nations' evolved over time. In addition, the definition of who was Mina or Angola changed according not only to the period but also to the city or region in the Americas: the Minas in Salvador included other ethnic groups than the Minas in Rio de Janeiro. Yet notwithstanding their original inconsistency, many of the terms defining slave 'nations' acquired new meanings in the Americas. When adopted by the slaves themselves, these 'nations' could reflect ongoing processes of ethnogenesis and express new, colonial identities that have remained significant until the present. The twentieth-century creation of the capoeira styles Angola and Regional, for instance, is, to some extent, a recurrence of this pattern.

The configuration of the slave trade and the distribution of captives among plantations constituted another crucial factor in the formation of colonial slave identities. It is well known that most colonies received slaves from a wide range of different backgrounds, usually from at least three or four of the cultural subzones mentioned above.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes planters deliberately mixed slaves from different origins on their estates to assure better control and to avoid unrest. One of the reasons why many slave rebellions did not succeed was precisely because rebels from one 'nation' failed to secure support from the other ethnic groups on the plantation. On the other hand planters were seldom offered great choice when purchasing their slaves. The vicissitudes of the slave trade usually forced planters to purchase their workers from a relatively homogenous lot offered on the market after the arrival of a slave ship. As a result, the slave population on most plantations, although never completely homogenous in ethnic terms, did invariably consist of some dominant 'nations', sizeable groups of half a dozen, a dozen or even more slaves who shared a common cultural heritage. That meant a significant number of slaves could communicate with each other, be it in their own language, in a lingua franca or because they spoke related idioms. Furthermore, their possibilities of communication extended beyond the plantation. Although masters aspired to limit the mobility of their chattel, slaves from different plantations met on a number of occasions: while executing tasks for their master, or during mass, religious festivals, carnival and civic celebrations. The practice of *petit marronage*, whereby slaves ran away for the night in order to see a mistress or to attend some celebration elsewhere, was obviously not allowed. But exasperated overseers or masters often had no other choice than to tolerate these manifestations of slaves' low-level resistance.

The point to make here is that slavery, despite its imposition of harsh labour conditions, bad food, housing and clothing, did not prevent slaves from having a social life—and in this respect I disagree with scholars who argue that enslavement resulted in 'social death' for captives.<sup>26</sup> The study of slavery has, for a long time, remained trapped in a dichotomy, whereby slaves supposedly had only two options: revolt and die heroically or accept the brutality they were subjected to and suffer in silence. Research over the last 20 years has, on the contrary, clearly shown the complexity of slave agency. Between martyrdom such as the one experienced by the maroon chief Zumbi and total assimilation and disempowerment as symbolized by 'Uncle Tom', a wide range of possibilities existed, which involved deception and other forms of low-level resistance, as well as some forms of negotiation with the master or overseer.<sup>27</sup> It is precisely in the every day struggle for survival, and for the affirmation of a human condition partly denied by their masters, that slaves forged their culture, shaped by the complex dialectics of resistance and accommodation. For that purpose they not only tried to maintain their own traditions, and to find a common ground with related cultures, but they also re-appropriated elements and manifestations of slave society dominated by European culture. Yet it seems that it was primarily within these reconstituted 'nations' that African slaves sought to perpetuate their culture and to constitute new forms of solidarity and kinship.

### Slave culture in Brazil

The strongest case for the existence of African ‘retentions’, or slave practices that can be seen as ‘extensions’ of originally African cultures is undoubtedly in the field of religion. Since Nina Rodrigues, scholars have pointed out to what extent Afro-Brazilian religions transmitted African values, aesthetics and spirituality. Despite the constraints of slavery, African captives transplanted the worship of their gods, which involved elaborate rituals, to Brazil. Bastide and his successors have highlighted that the Bahian *candomblé* represents a complex religious system with four complementary dimensions: the worship of the gods, the cult of ancestors, divination and healing. Until today traditional cult houses pray to the *orixás* in ritual languages that are derived from Yoruba, Fon or Kimbundu, even if many followers do no longer understand the meaning of the words.<sup>28</sup> Many studies have established clear links regarding formal aspects and cultural meanings of religions on both sides of the Atlantic; some have also shown the importance of ongoing transatlantic links.

The recognition of all those important continuities does not mean, however, that no or few changes occurred. On the contrary, practitioners introduced a number of significant alterations, even in the houses reputed to be the most traditional. One major transformation consisted in uniting the cult of different gods—worshipped separately in Africa—creating, thus, a ‘little Africa’ in the single space of the *terreiro*.<sup>29</sup> Since Bastide scholars have emphasized that syncretism—the specific form of creolization in the religious domain—occurred as much among the African religions as between them and the religious traditions of the colonizers.<sup>30</sup> The similarities between African religious traditions within each cultural sub area obviously eased their fusion in the diaspora. Yet inter-African syncretism even amalgamated elements from culturally more diverse backgrounds. The formation of neo-African ‘nations’ in *candomblé* never meant strict segmentation and absolute separation between the Nagô, Jeje and Angola traditions. It is well known that the Angola cults, often characterized or even stigmatized as more syncretic or flexible, embraced many features of the Nagô tradition, and even the whole Yoruba pantheon. Hence in Brazil, the Central African worshippers of *inquices* adopted the ritual structure of the West African cult of the *orixás*, and thus created the *candomblé de Angola*. It is less known, however, that the organization and ceremonies of the most traditional houses in Bahia, which claim to belong to the Nagô-Ketu or the Ketu nation, are in fact much closer to the religious model of the Fons from Benin.<sup>31</sup> Anthropologists have furthermore pointed out that the ‘African’ character of many aspects of *candomblé* are social constructions that arise out of specific Brazilian contexts, and which can therefore vary according to the location.<sup>32</sup> Despite all those mutual borrowings, adaptations and re-inventions, one point has to remain clear: within the realm of African-derived religion, slaves and their descendents did not primarily build pan-African, black or Brazilian identities, but rather associated with particular, neo-African nations that seemed more suited to express their aspirations.

Yet not all slaves worshipped exclusively African gods. The ambiguous relationship with the masters’ faith and church constituted the other fundamental aspect of slave religion. Albeit a sizeable group of Africans had already adopted Christianity in Kongo/Angola, many slaves were forced to convert to Catholicism and were immersed into a dominant Catholic universe. Depending on their master’s attitude they might have to attend mass and observe other Catholic rituals. How many genuinely adopted Christian values and how many just pretended to do so is a matter of debate, but both attitudes undoubtedly coexisted. Slaves willing to deceive their masters readily discovered that the easiest way to do this was by superimposing the cult of Catholic saints on that of their African deities, resulting in the well known association, in Bahia, of Jesus with the Nagô *orixá* Oxalá, St Barbara with Yansã, St George with Oxossi and St Anthony with Ogun. Thus, slaves used festivals dedicated to a Catholic saint to discreetly worship a corresponding African God. Some scholars argue that over time people were unable to disentangle the two,



and that therefore syncretism was real, not faked. Others have adopted a more Afrocentric view, pleading that deception was maintained over time and up to the present. They feel confirmed by the fact that many contemporary *candomblé* leaders now advocate a strict separation between *candomblé* and Catholicism. That is however a recent development and does not constitute any evidence that syncretism did not occur in the past.

On the contrary, what is striking about *candomblé* adepts up to the 1970s at least, is not only their ease in proclaiming their Christian faith, but also their active role within that religion. Research has shown that key figures of the *candomblé* world in Bahia, such as mãe Aninha and Martiniano do Bomfim, were also influential members of Catholic brotherhoods.<sup>33</sup> Rather than assuming permanent deception on the part of thousands of *candomblé* practitioners over generations, I find the idea that both religions did coexist more convincing. It has also been argued that polytheist African religions can easily integrate new gods without necessarily altering their whole systems. By contrast, a monotheist religion loses its internal coherence by adopting new gods. Therefore *candomblé* adepts could worship the 'new' saints without feeling that they were betraying the gods of their ancestors. In this case the process of merging different religious traditions consisted rather in juxtapositions and convergences than in a real fusion. The term syncretism therefore needs to be broken down in order to refine further the analysis of such complex phenomena.<sup>34</sup>

So if it is possible to identify areas of slave and Afro-Brazilian culture characterized by a strong—even though never exclusive—African heritage, it is also important to acknowledge by the same token that this was not always possible or desired and involved only a segment of slaves and free Afro-Brazilians, mainly in and around the cities or eventually in major maroon communities. In general, the most popular forms were and are highly syncretic, merging a wide range of traditions. Even the cult houses considered most 'pure' or 'traditional' survived only through re-inventions and concessions to the dominant faith. On the other hand, one might argue that in doing so they possibly all adopted a quite 'African' posture, which considered that it was better to add different spiritual forces rather than to oppose them.

It is also crucial to underline that syncretism did not occur only with an abstract Roman Catholicism, but also or even more so with a much wider range of beliefs and practices related to European medieval traditions of mysticism (including the Jewish Caballa) and pagan Iberian elements, and, last but not least, some native American traditions that eventually survived the ethnocide, such as *catimbó* and *pajelança*. In other words, Portuguese popular religion and culture were already 'syncretic' before arriving in the Americas, and this eased subsequent creolization processes. The same holds for the Africans from the Kongo/ Angola region deported to the Americas. The Manicongo, or king of Kongo had converted to Christianity as early as 1491, and subsequently many of his subjects became Christians. The pope consecrated a Kongolese prince as the first black bishop in 1518.<sup>35</sup> In the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Benguela, Catholicism was also imposed on the Africans, and was adopted even by long-time opponents of European expansionism such as the famous queen Njinga.<sup>36</sup> The expansion of the Christian faith into the region was accompanied by substantial adaptations and re-arrangements. In fact, the Catholic hierarchy often despaired over the Africanization of religious practices. In other words, syncretism between Catholicism and native religions already occurred in Africa, even before Angolans were shipped over to the Americas. And creolization was not limited to the religious domain alone. As Linda Heywood asserts: 'Whatever may have been the circumstances of their capture and enslavement, what most of the enslaved Africans who came through the Portuguese-controlled coastal ports of Luanda and Benguela in the eighteenth century had in common was some exposure to the Afro-Lusitanian culture.'<sup>37</sup> Since creolization was not restricted to the Americas, but occurred on both sides of the Atlantic, the distinction between African and creole is less meaningful than often assumed.

If religion constituted the realm of harsh conflicts, where the ruthless repression unleashed by the authorities was met by the most stubborn resistance from the captives, other manifestations of slave culture eventually met less systematic opposition. The case of the more profane *batuques* illustrates how, despite periodic clampdowns and prohibitions, African culture had extended quickly beyond its original constituency from at least the eighteenth century. *Batuque* was a generic term already used by the Portuguese in Angola to designate any singing and dancing by natives.<sup>38</sup> In Brazil the expression kept this encompassing definition. Any dance by slaves or freedmen taking place in a circle, accompanied by singing and handclapping and—but not always—drums or other instruments, was called *batuque* in late colonial and nineteenth-century sources.

The widespread and generic use of the term suggests that the authorities were either unable or unwilling to distinguish between what were possibly very different manifestations. Yet the ‘dissolute movements’ and the ‘unbridled pantomimes’ of black bodies, and especially their ‘artificial rotations and contortions of the hip’ inevitably impressed European observers.<sup>39</sup> They usually failed, however, to comment on the meaning of the *batuque* for the slaves. Did it only serve recreational purposes, as most sources seem to suggest by insisting on its licentious character, or did it also have religious meanings? Since the slaves knew all too well that ‘idolatry’ was more likely to be repressed than profane recreations, they would not insist on explaining the meaning to masters and white observers and we are therefore, once more, left without conclusive evidence.<sup>40</sup> Colonial authorities seem to have tolerated *batuques* for long periods of time, and so did plantation owners—who, after all, were relatively free to determine how their slaves were allowed to spend their time off. The Church permitted black distractions as long as they remained ‘honest, and decent’.<sup>41</sup> African dances were even performed to honour the Portuguese monarch João VI while he resided in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>42</sup> This apparently tolerant attitude was in line with the public display of power and reflected the proliferation of colonial identities encouraged by the colonial baroque.<sup>43</sup>

Yet elites in Brazil became profoundly divided over the issue of African diversions, as can be seen from the frequent changes in policy towards the end of the colonial period. In Salvador, the Conde da Ponte, governor of Bahia between 1805 and 1809, tried to suppress the ‘absolute freedom’ slaves enjoyed with respect to dances, clothes and religion. One of his successors, however, the famous Conde dos Arcos, explicitly took the opposite stance. He instructed a judge in Cachoeira that the safest way to avoid disorder consisted in allowing slaves to dance on Sundays and holidays.<sup>44</sup> In the wake of the Muslim slave revolt of 1835, authorities adopted a tougher stance again, most whites now seeing *batuques* again as inherently dangerous. In Rio, after years of tolerance the authorities also opted for harsher repression during the period of political troubles that followed independence and especially after the abdication of the Emperor in 1831, arresting dancers and breaking up the nightly gatherings of captives. The success of these actions was however limited: according to Mary Karasch, ‘police correspondence is eloquent on their inability to prevent slaves from dancing’.<sup>45</sup>

Whilst authorities and planters debated the best policy towards the *batuques*, and the police eventually tried to suppress them, the forms and social context of the practice slowly evolved. Originally danced by slaves from Kongo/Angola and Mozambique, creole slaves and the manumitted proved equally enthusiastic about the *batuque* and many of the free coloured also joined in.<sup>46</sup> They brought along the instruments they were familiar with, and soon not only scrapers, rattles, bells, xylophones and hand pianos (marimbas), but also stringed instruments (guitars, lutes and harps) entered the *batuque*. Some sources suggest that West African instruments, for instance the Hausa *goge*, were also played (see Figure 2.1). Since both drums and other percussive instruments were common to West Africa and Kongo/Angola, it does not always make much sense to establish clean genealogies of affiliation to particular African ethnicities. The use of drums specific to an African cultural area provides an important indication of the origins of a particular





Figure 2.1 Africans in Brazil played many instruments that have now disappeared to accompany rough dances and combat games. Watercolour by P. Harro-Harring. By permission of the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro, Rio de Janeiro.

manifestation; yet their presence does not exclude other contributions from elsewhere, especially in the case of more encompassing and profane expressions of slave culture. For instance, single and double metal bells were widely used in both West and Central Africa, and thus musical traditions from these two macro-regions reinforced each other in the New World. Known in Brazil under its Yoruba name, the *agogô* entered *candomblé*, *batuque* and capoeira alike. The Brazilian *berimbau* derives from Central African music bows, but the woven rattle (*caxixi*) that accompanies it in Brazil is likely to be of West African origin (see [Figure 2.2](#)).



Figure 2.2 Many nineteenth-century painters documented the use of the *berimbau* among slaves, although never associated it with combat games. 'The Old African Orpheus "Oricongo"', watercolour by Jean-Baptiste Debret. Courtesy of the Museu Castro Maya—IPHAN/MinC, Rio de Janeiro.

The diversification of instruments and audiences was also accompanied by changes in the songs. If the basic structure of one solo singer and a chorus were maintained, Portuguese tended to replace African languages; since one of the main attractions consisted precisely in the questions or comments thrown to the public by the solo singer, that change was necessary in order to adapt to a wider, multi-ethnic audience. Whilst swift change characterized instruments, audiences, and texts, the rhythmic patterns seemed to have remained more stable. Ethno-musicologists insist that in contrast to instruments, which were used across various culture zones, rhythmic patterns marked more specific, regional identities.<sup>47</sup> G.Kubik has called time-line patterns ‘the metric back-bone’ of African music:

They are orientation patterns, steering and holding together the motional process, with participating musicians and dancers depending on them. In this quality the removal or even slight modification of a time-line pattern immediately leads to the disintegration of the music concerned.<sup>48</sup>

He asserts that these rhythmic key signatures enjoyed great constancy over time. Thus a 12-pulse pattern in its seven-stroke version played on a bell can be identified as a West African Coastal tradition (Akan/Fon/Yoruba) or a 16-pulse pattern as coming from the Kongo/Angola region.<sup>49</sup> These rhythmic patterns were recognized by performers and audiences, and just like the ceremonial music of *candomblé*, they contributed to maintain specific neo-African identities or ‘nations’.<sup>50</sup> The emphasis on percussion, polyrhythm, collective participation, vocal call and response, and dancing in a circle constituted not only Angolan or Bantu, but more general African features that were maintained in the Brazilian *batuques* and in capoeira. Yet *batuque* and capoeira were identified with Central Africa. They were thus instrumental in the constitution of various ‘Bantu’ identities for slaves and their descendants in Brazil, despite their incorporation of features from other musical cultures.

The songs performed during *batuques* were however increasingly shaped by local and emerging national traditions, and evolved further during the nineteenth century. From Spix and Martius’ account we know that by the end of the colonial period not only improvised songs but also the emerging Brazilian *modinhas* were already sung at *batuques*. In Rio de Janeiro and some other regions a related genre, the *lundu*, emerged during the second half of the eighteenth century. Although the term is also of Angolan origin and seems to have originally designated a dance tradition from the eastern hinterland of Luanda,<sup>51</sup> most Brazilian scholars consider the Brazilian *lundu* a further development of the *batuque*. Longer songs and more emphasis on the *viola* characterized the former, although the rhythmic pattern of the *batuque* was maintained. Dancers still executed the ‘belly bounce’ (*umbigada*), considered a key marker of Central African dances, and also used the characteristic snapping of the fingers. The *lundu* was adopted by middle-class composers, to the point that some *lundu* songs came close to the more erudite *modinhas*.<sup>52</sup> On the other side, the *lundu* strongly resembled another dance popular among the coloured lower classes, the Portuguese-derived *fado*, so that observers had difficulties in establishing a difference between them.<sup>53</sup> The same holds for the difference between *lundu* and *batuque*: sources do not allow a clean separation.<sup>54</sup>

In Bahia, the *batuque* evolved into different forms of *samba* (*samba de viola*, *samba de roda*, etc.) but nobody has been able so far to establish precisely what changed and why the older denomination *batuque* was abandoned.<sup>55</sup> It appears as if one generic term for a range of related musical styles and dance performances replaced the other, both demarcating quite wide—although not identical—semantic fields.<sup>56</sup> The encompassing meaning of *batuque* in nineteenth-century Brazil is illustrated by the fact that in Bahia the term ended up designating a martial dance, whereas in the southern province of Rio Grande it became the overall denomination for Afro-Brazilian religion. What lessons can be learnt from this rather confusing situation, where on the one hand one broad term designated a range of different and changing phenomena,

but on the other closely related practices could be known under various names?<sup>57</sup> One needs to conclude that encompassing terms such as *batuque* or *samba* did not necessarily mean identical things in different places and periods, but rather had a generic meaning. As we are going to see, the same applies to capoeira.

### *From slave to popular culture*

If slaves recreated their own religions and pastimes, they also actively participated, albeit in a limited way, in the broader social life. The best example of this involvement are the lay confraternities, the only formal institution slaves could legally belong to. The Church encouraged the constitution of brotherhoods, considering them a means of spreading the gospel among the free population in general, and amongst the mass of 'fetishist' or only superficially Christianized slaves and freed people in particular. These lay associations brought together persons according to colour, ethnic and status criteria. Elite brotherhoods only accept whites or the wealthy light-skinned considered as such, whilst the poorer confraternities usually accepted indiscriminately slaves and free people. In Rio de Janeiro, Our Lady of the Rosary was the most popular patron saint of black and mulatto brotherhoods, followed by St Anthony and black saints such as St Benedict, St Ephigenia, St Balthasar and St Elesbão.<sup>58</sup> In Salvador, as many as six black and five mulatto confraternities were dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary at the end of the eighteenth century, and a further 11 black brotherhoods were devoted to other saints.<sup>59</sup> Whilst some liberally admitted members from all ethnic backgrounds, others insisted on selecting their members not only according to 'colour', but even on the basis of a more specific ethnic identity, excluding for instance all Angola slaves from their midst or being open to Jejes only. Most black brotherhoods admitted women, but denied them any participation in decision-making. Some black women founded exclusively female corporations, such as the sisterhoods of Our Lady of the Good Death in Salvador and Cachoeira.

The membership in Catholic brotherhoods seemed to have allowed the strengthening of particular identities based on gender, class, colour and ethnicity. Black brotherhoods elected 'kings' and 'queens' of particular 'nations' who could be slaves or free. Accompanied by their 'court' and to the sound of drums and other instruments, the royal couple, dressed in colourful costumes, paraded in the streets to raise money for the annual festival of the patron saint. On that day, a particularly glamorous procession paraded through the streets, providing a public exhibition of the importance and wealth of the brotherhood. Especially well documented are the elections of the Congo kings, usually associated with the devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary. The *congadas*, as they were also called, included a number of rituals representing the ceremonial of a monarchy, and putting on stage, as it were, ambassadors and secretaries of state. White observers often ridiculed the *congada*, interpreting it as a grotesque imitation of European courts by ignorant slaves who attached weight only to the exterior trappings of royalty.

The importance of *congadas* has been reassessed by some scholars, who claim they reproduced political traditions of the Congo area, and can be seen as further evidence of African 'extensions' in Brazil.<sup>60</sup> Fernando Ortiz already linked the election of Congo kings in Cuba to the rituals carried out since the sixteenth century by the Christian king Don Alfonso Nvemba-Nzinga and his successors in the capital Kongo-Mbanza.<sup>61</sup> Although African imaginaries certainly played an important role, it has to be said that this type of parade was first performed by the black brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary at the monastery of St Domingos in Lisbon. J.R.Tinhorão suggested that the spectacle, which saw the most important African sovereign paying tribute, was part of a strategy to display the power of the Portuguese monarchy.<sup>62</sup> The Lisbon congregation, which served as the model for the Brazilian brotherhoods, also used to elect a whole court with king and nobles among its members. It is therefore again difficult to attribute precise and unilateral 'origins' to such a multifaceted manifestation, and safer to assume that different

traditions of royalty converged in the celebration of these 'African kingdoms' under the mantle of the Church. Marina de Mello e Souza has shown the cultural hybridity of the *congadas* and concluded that the black king was a 'symbol of a mythic and homogenized Africa'.<sup>63</sup> The black brotherhoods not only represented 'the triumph of a continuing strategy to preserve a link to Africa', but constituted an 'intercontinental web' created by Atlantic creoles that stretched from Lisbon, São Tomé, Angola to Brazil.<sup>64</sup>

In fact not only the Congo slaves elected their kings, but those from other 'nations' as well. As recent research on brotherhoods in Rio de Janeiro shows, other particular ethnicities were maintained and developed under the umbrella of the universalistic Catholic Church. The confraternity of St Elesbão and St Ephigenia, founded in 1740, admitted slaves from the Mina Coast, from Cabo Verde, São Tomé and Mozambique, but excluded initially the Angolas, creoles and mulattos (*cabras*). Several 'kingdoms' or 'follies' (*reinados* or *folias*) were created within that brotherhood, resulting in—first—a subdivision between the members from the Mina Coast and all the others, each group electing its own royal couple. As further conflicts developed among the different ethnic groups subsumed initially under the general denomination Mina (such as the Agolin, the Dagomé and the Maki), a number of smaller *folias* were subsequently created, regrouping several, or in the case of the Maki, only one of these smaller West African nations.<sup>65</sup>

What is the significance of this development of neo-African ethnic identities within the colonizer's institutions? At first sight one might be tempted to read it exclusively as a sign of the slaves' cultural resistance. Some data indeed suggest that the religious institutions organized along 'national' boundaries allowed the preservation of older, African practices. Brotherhoods, or smaller congregations such as the 'kingdoms' they contained, were sometimes accused by outsiders—including slaves belonging to other 'nations'—of perpetuating 'superstitious', e.g. African religious practices. This kind of 'retention' would support the idea of slave 'deception'. Furthermore, congregations and brotherhoods also fostered the development of new, colonial identities, which constituted 'extensions' of originally African ethnicities. Thus, parallel to the process of inter-African syncretism occurring in the proto-*candomblés*, the re-approximation and eventually the fusion of groups that shared common cultural traits or a similar history of enslavement resulted in the formation of colonial, neo-African 'nations' such as Angola, Congo and Benguela. These, in effect, substituted the original ethnicities. A similar amalgamation resulted in the emergence of Nagô and Jeje identities for West Africans and their descendants. It is therefore important to emphasize that Nagô, for instance, is not just a Brazilian term for the Yoruba in West Africa, but rather the result of a specific, colonial process of ethnogenesis. Therefore the emergence of the Nagô in Brazil, the Yoruba in what is now Nigeria or the Lucumi in colonial Cuba are the result of parallel developments within the Black Atlantic.<sup>66</sup>

On the other side it is absolutely clear that slaveholders and authorities often encouraged the formation of these compartmented slave 'nations' as a means of social control. As already discussed in relation to the *batuques*, celebrations such as the elections of a 'Congo King' were allowed because they seemed to perpetrate ethnic divisions among slaves and to stabilize the otherwise fragile domination of a relatively small white minority. It is thus difficult to locate the emergence of neo-African identities within a simple dichotomy of resistance versus accommodation, since different readings of the same phenomenon are possible: they served purposes of self-affirmation for slaves and freed persons, but they were also used by elites as a tool of social control. What is clear, however, is that these 'extended' neo-African identities acquired new meanings in the colonial context. As the example of the brotherhoods shows, the relations between slave religion and Catholicism, and between slave and broader popular culture were complex and intertwined. Often specific features of slave culture and religion were embedded into wider manifestations.

The distinction between sacred and profane is equally hazardous in the case of colonial and imperial Brazil, since religion permeated every aspect of life in both African and early modern Catholic societies. It is also necessary to highlight that Iberian popular Catholicism constituted a very different belief system from what is, in the Anglophone world, commonly understood by Christianity. Popular Catholicism as it was introduced in Brazil constituted a complex fusion of older Iberian, partially pagan practices and rituals with Christian beliefs. The absorption of African elements constituted therefore only a further separation of popular practice of Catholicism in Kongo/Angola and Brazil from Roman orthodoxy. This process had been encouraged through the institution of the patronage (*padroado*), whereby the Pope had delegated the administration of the colonial Church to the Portuguese crown, the expulsion of the Jesuits and the limited number of secular priests in Brazil, the particularly lax customs of the clergy in the colony, and the consequent privatization of religion.<sup>67</sup> The situation only changed in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Vatican implemented its harsh policy of Romanization in Brazil, leading to new attitudes towards popular Catholicism in general and Afro-Brazilian culture in particular. Until that moment, the integration of African elements into wider celebrations was not necessarily seen as irremediably negative. On the contrary, as long as manifestations remained 'honest' and 'decent', they could be seen as a contribution towards the exaltation of the universal values of Christendom.

If African practices such as the *batuque* became increasingly creolized, so did European celebrations. The 'Africanization' of wider popular culture in Brazilian cities can be shown through the evolution of what constituted the most important annual celebrations, the festival of the Divine Spirit in Rio de Janeiro and the festival of Our Lord of the Good End in Salvador. Both festivals originated within the tradition of Portuguese Catholic devotions, but absorbed so many African elements that they became largely multicultural and syncretic. *Batuques* and *sambas* figured prominently in both celebrations to the point that ecclesiastical authorities recommended intervention and the police carried out rigorous repression. Yet despite periodic clampdowns, these festivals became privileged sites for intense vertical and horizontal cultural exchanges, mixing groups of diverse colour, class and status.<sup>68</sup>

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Brazilian popular culture underwent constant change and re-elaborations. This makes rigid classifications of formal aspects or social context as strictly 'African' or 'traditional' inadequate. The difference between 'African', 'slave' or 'black' was often blurred, since audiences—in particular of recreational practices—rapidly changed and tended to lose their exclusive character.<sup>69</sup> In that respect one should rather view these manifestations, as Herskovits has suggested, as having various degrees of 'African intensity'. On the other hand, we should be aware—just as contemporaries were—that music and dance fulfilled important functions in the redefinition of ethnic identities and style. Capoeira rhythms having neo-African names such as Angola or Benguela are thus perfectly in line with the historical formation of slave culture.

### Combat games of the Black Atlantic

Slave traders deprived their African captives of any weapons before embarking on the Middle Passage. Thus, when slaves needed to fight in their New World environment, they had to transform their bodies into weapons. A common story told in capoeira groups states that the art uses mainly kicks and head butts because slaves had their hands tied in shackles and thus had to use other parts of their bodies in their desperate attempt to defend themselves against overseers and slave catchers. This explanation is often expanded further to suggest that runaway slaves used capoeira in the Brazilian backlands against the Portuguese. Unfortunately, not a single document supports these claims. On the contrary, sources dealing

with Palmares and other runaway settlements reckon that maroons used bows, arrows, and even firearms when fighting the armies sent out to catch them.<sup>70</sup>

The image of the African fighting with bare hands seems to derive from the already mentioned common ignorance of African history and African warfare. Many African states maintained professional armies, whose soldiers were experts in the use of sword, club, axe, spear, shield, bow and arrow. As John Thornton has pointed out in a seminal article on the topic, the art of war in Angola evolved considerably after the arrival of the Europeans, and both they and the Africans had to adapt to new circumstances.<sup>71</sup> As a result not only arquebus and firearms (muskets) but even artillery was introduced on the Angolan battlefields. Some African armies experimented with cotton armours, since the use of armour—more than firearms or horses—seems to have been a key to the military success of the Portuguese in Angola. It appears therefore that one should not look too much into African warfare for the origins of capoeira. But war dances and combat games also featured prominently in many, if not all, African societies and were part of the arts of war in the widest sense. Unfortunately the literature on this topic is scarce to the point that one can hardly dare to give an overview.

### *African combat games*

From the scattered published sources at our disposal, it is clear that Africans used a wide range of fighting techniques. Many of these were practised as combat games, that is, performed in contests with specific rules.<sup>72</sup> It is difficult to assess for the pre-colonial period to what extent some of these combat games constituted martial arts, based on specific philosophical and aesthetic principles only shared by practitioners. Combat games can be classified according to their formal aspects into wrestling, hand or fist fighting (boxing), kicking and head butting. A number of combat games also involved the use of weapons such as sticks or spears.<sup>73</sup> Most arts were and are particularly strong in one or several of the African macro-regions. Wrestling is especially prominent in West Africa, but also known in many other parts of the continent, including Angola and Mozambique. Stick fighting is widely performed in most of Southern and Central Africa, but is also practised in West and East Africa.<sup>74</sup> ‘Traditional’ fist fighting is still important in present-day Nigeria and Cameroon. In contrast to the almost continental (and one should add universal) dissemination of wrestling and stick fighting, references to combat games that use kicking and head butting are much more limited. The known sources suggest that it was and is practised by some groups in Central Africa, on Madagascar and other islands of the Indian Ocean where African slaves were introduced.

The social context of African combat games varied widely. Wrestling, for instance, was sometimes practised by pre-pubescent boys, but in other cases it was part of the initiation ceremonies around puberty. It was sometimes linked to circumcision, or to secret societies and cult groups.<sup>75</sup> Even though most of the time wrestling was limited to younger age groups, on some occasions even married men wrestled. In a number of matrilineal societies girls also participated in wrestling contests, and sometimes boys and girls wrestled against each other. The place for wrestling contests varied accordingly, from the town marketplace to hidden locations outside the settlements. Stick fighting is also commonly associated with younger age groups.

Combat games fulfilled a wide range of social functions. In the Crossriver region of Cameroon (known as Calabar to slave traders) wrestling contests also served as a means of settling quarrels, but they could also symbolize the rivalry between marriage groups (the bridegroom’s age group relatives fighting with those of the bride). Wrestling between boys and girls could dramatize the ambivalence of male-female relationships. In other contexts wrestling styles served as means of group identification. Wrestling helped to establish male rank order and good wrestlers always gained prestige within their kinship group and their community.



Many—although not all—forms were associated with music and dance and embedded in wider ceremonies.<sup>76</sup> Wrestling is also particularly important among the Yoruba in southern Nigeria:

In the Edo kingdom it is highly valued. The *oba* [traditional ruler] holds a ritual festival Igwe during which his body is spiritually fortified for the coming year. As his body also stands for the kingdom it protects the kingdom for the coming year. There is a tradition of wrestlers coming from all over the Edo kingdom to Benin City (the centre of the kingdom) to win fame and fortune by successfully wrestling in front of the *oba*, defeating the *oba*'s champion and becoming the new champion.<sup>77</sup>

Most writing on African combat games dates from the twentieth century, when these activities started to be considered as 'traditional sports'. Yet what appears to be 'traditional', in contrast to modern sports, is inevitably the result of a long history with substantial changes in forms, contexts and meanings: '[...] Even though traditional wrestling seems to have its modern counterparts, we cannot assume that because of similarities of product there are continuities of meaning and significance'.<sup>78</sup> African societies underwent so much transformation over the last centuries that one has to assume that these 'traditional' combat games have also substantially evolved in the same period. Islamization, for instance, inevitably resulted in the devaluation and often the disappearance of combat traditions linked to 'pagan' rituals. Therefore any twentieth-century form considered 'traditional' is not necessarily strong evidence for similar, earlier practices. The unqualified intermingling of combat games' descriptions from different centuries constitutes a serious methodological flaw and can lead, as we are going to see, to inconsistent conclusions.

Unfortunately there are very few descriptions of early African combat games, in particular from the time of the slave trade. One of the oldest references is from a sixteenth-century Portuguese author, who described a contest with daggers among the Wolof in Guinea:

Among the Jalofofos there is a custom that is not mentioned in any of the chapters, which is to practise a form of duel called guibapida, in which the combatants stand still and use only one dagger, the first one strikes the other, (then) gives him the dagger so that he may strike back with it. In this way they may kill each other, but sometimes those who do this avoid death. The Barbacins have the same practice.<sup>79</sup>

There seems to be no modern equivalent of this type of contest, even though a wide range of traditional combat games are still practised in contemporary Guinea and Senegal. The Wolof are now known for a style that mixes wrestling and fist-fighting.<sup>80</sup>

In some instances combat games became central for the constitution of ethnic identities. Olaudah Equiano (1745–97), for example, described his abduction from his Igbo home in present day Nigeria and his long journey to the coast where he was sold to a European slave trader. Initially he is taken through villages where people still 'resembled our own in their manners, customs and language'. At some point nearer to the coast, however, Equiano is struck by the fact that inhabitants now differed in almost everything from his culture. They did not circumcise, they used European tools unknown to him, and they 'fought with their fists among themselves'.<sup>81</sup> Equiano saw fist fighting as a marker of ethnic difference because Igbo wrestling (*mgba*) involved only grappling with the aim to throw the opponent to the ground.<sup>82</sup>

In the past, African combat games have often been associated with warfare.<sup>83</sup> Combat games have an obvious martial character, and soldiers, mercenaries or combatants practised them or war dances to show their skills and acquire status. However, given the lack of detailed descriptions prior to the twentieth century, the difference between combat games, war dances and martial training is often difficult to establish

for earlier periods. The theory that presentday combat games such as capoeira derive from tougher and more martial African combat training is thus very hard to prove, and rather relies on questionable assumptions about the insignificance of combat games in pre-colonial African societies.<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, one should not exclude other cultural forms from having had an impact on the formation of Afro-American combat games. We also need to consider the dances that made use of elaborate bodily techniques. Masquerade traditions existing throughout West Africa, for instance, often involve highly acrobatic and dynamic movements. In the whirling dances of the Yoruba Egungun masquerade the mask wearer 'spins madly around the village', executing dangerous movements, knocking people down and occasionally even injuring them.<sup>85</sup> A systematic examination of these acrobatic dances might establish further commonalities with Afro-American combat games and art forms.

In this section I will limit my discussion to some Central African forms that have been explicitly linked to the origins of capoeira. European chroniclers have commented on martial skills amongst Angola's inhabitants since the Portuguese involvement in the area during the sixteenth century. According to Thornton, mock combats were a 'prominent feature' of military reviews in Kongo/Angola, 'just as drill might have been in Europe'. Therefore, and despite my earlier insistence on the difference between the arts of war and combat games, important links existed between both. Movements from the latter might be used in warfare, since most Angolan (and I suspect more generally African) soldiers 'relied heavily on personal maneuver as part of their technique of fighting'.<sup>86</sup> Thornton has also drawn attention to one crucial piece of evidence from a sixteenth-century Jesuit, who describes the abilities of the soldiers from the Ndongo kingdom as follows: 'All their defense consists of *sanguar*, which is to leap from one side to another with a thousand twists and such agility that they can dodge arrows and spears'.<sup>87</sup>

The Italian missionary Cavazzi also mentions *sangamentos*, but uses this word rather as a synonym for military reviews through which Angolan rulers ensured their troops were well prepared and had the necessary fighting morale.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, neither he nor any other chronicler provides more detailed descriptions that would allow us to know more about the bodily techniques of military training. Accounts insist on arduous physical exercise and the use of weapons, but not a single seventeenth- or eighteenth-century author seems to mention the use of kicks or head butts. These accounts only allow us to conclude that mock combats were a substantial aspect of military training, and since hand-to-hand combat was central to the art of war, bodily techniques to avoid blows and attacks featured prominently in martial exercises.

Given the lack of pre-colonial materials, capoeira adepts have tended to part from the present in their search for the historic roots of the art. Since the 1960s capoeira has not only been linked to Angola, but more specifically to a contemporary combat game called *n'golo*. As we have seen in [Chapter 1](#), when the Angolan artist Albano de Neves e Souza came to Brazil in the 1960s, he was struck by the similarities in movements existing between capoeira in Brazil and *n'golo* he reported to have seen in Southern Angola. On his return from Brazil Neves e Souza published a series of drawings of *n'golo* and capoeira (see [Figure 2.3](#)). Only a brief statement of his hypothesis accompanied the illustrations:

N'golo, the Zebra Dance, is possibly the origin of the Capoeira, the fighting dance of Brazil. It is danced at the time of the 'Mufico', a puberty rite for the girls of the Mucupe and Mulondo regions. The object of the dance is to hit your opponent's face with your foot. A rhythm for the dance is beaten by clapping hands, and anyone who attempts a [b]low while outside the marked arena is disqualified. The 'Angolan Capoeira' in Brazil also has its special rhythm, which is one more reason to believe that it originates with the N'golo. N'golo means 'zebra', and to a certain extent the dance originates from



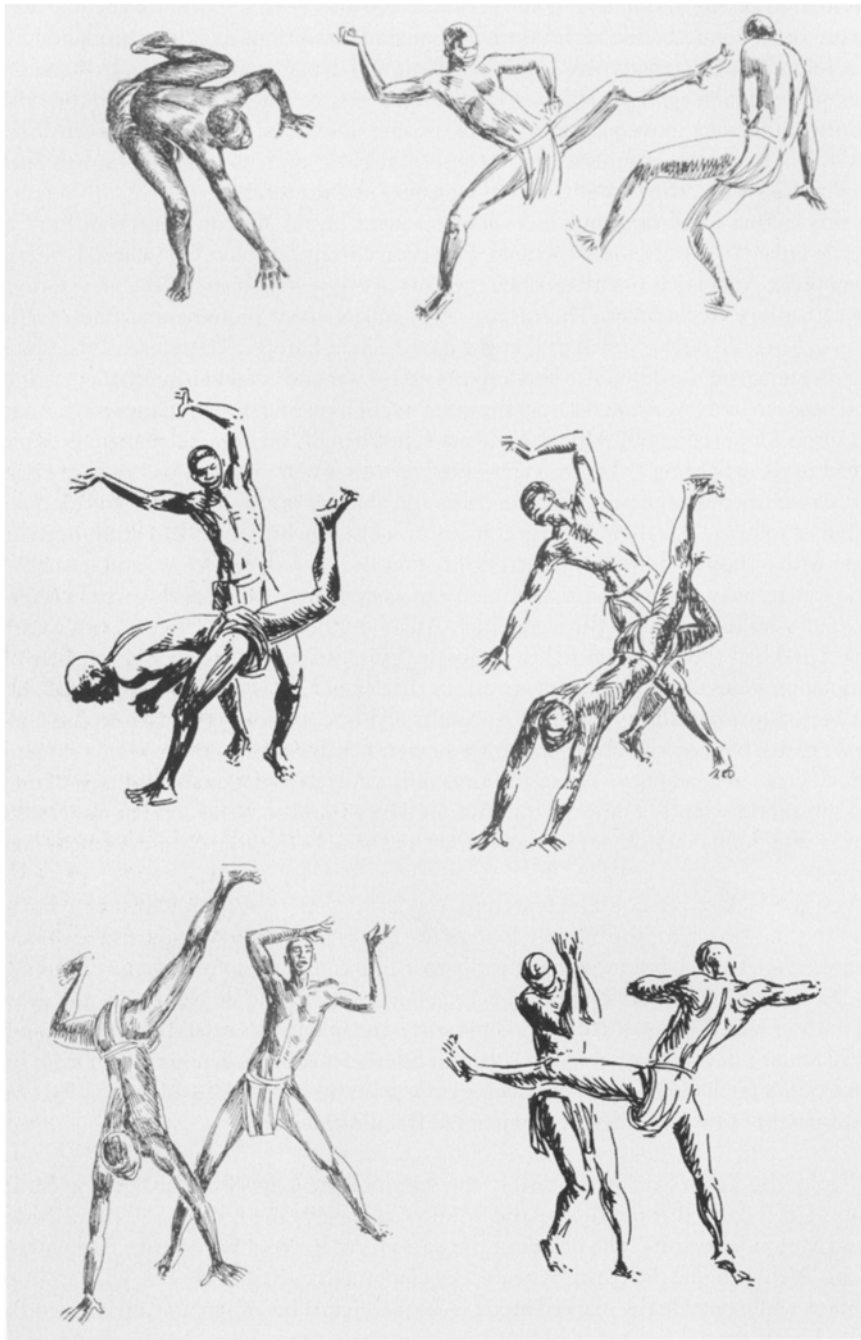


Figure 2.3 *N'golo*. Drawings by A. Neves e Souza, 1965, from...*Da minha África e do Brasil que eu vi...* (Luanda: n.p., n.d.). Courtesy of the National Library, Lisbon.

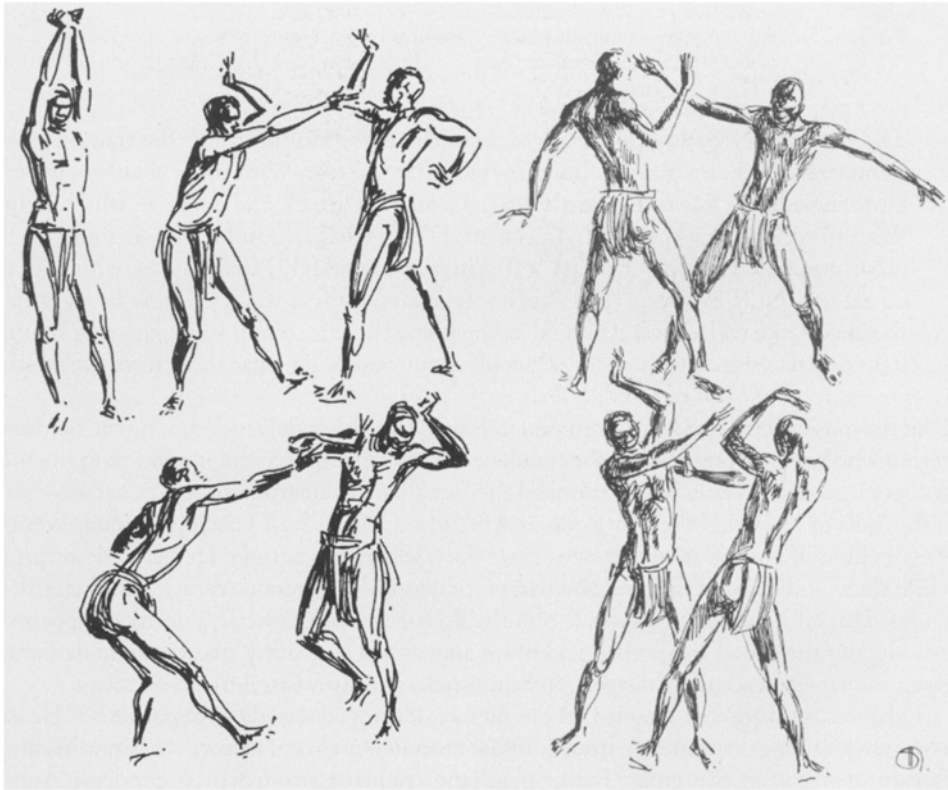


Figure 2.4 *Liveta*, preliminary phase of *n'golo*. Drawing by A. Neves e Souza, 1965, from...*Da minha África e do Brasil que eu vi...* (Luanda: n.p., n.d.). Courtesy of the National Library, Lisbon.

the leaps and battles of the zebra; the blow with the feet while the hands are touching the ground is certainly reminiscent of the zebra's kick.<sup>89</sup>

While in Brazil, Neves e Souza visited the capoeira academy of *Mestre Pastinha* and probably explained his theory to the doyen of the Angola style. He also maintained a correspondence with the Brazilian folklorist Câmara Cascudo. The latter relied almost exclusively on the information provided by Neves and Souza in his more detailed account of *n'golo*. Cascudo plainly endorsed the hypothesis that *n'golo* was the ancestor of capoeira.<sup>90</sup> Quoting Neves e Souza, he explained that *n'golo*, a 'zebra dance' was 'typical for the people in Southern Angola', which share similar customs and live mainly from cattle raising. He reported that the Angolan artist saw it among the Mulondo and the Mucope, and believed it was also practised by the Muxilengue and the Muhumbé. According to Neves e Souza it was danced during the Efundula, a festival that celebrated the passage of girls into adulthood, when they were allowed to marry and procreate. The young man who won the *n'golo* had the right to choose his bride among the recently initiated girls—without having to pay the dowry. The *n'golo* is initiated with an open-hand fight called *liveta*, whose goal is to eliminate the weakest players. The corresponding drawings by Neves e Souza (see Figure 2.4) resembles a *chamada* in contemporary capoeira Angola. Cascudo also mentions that the *liveta* is followed by a dance, 'the C'hankula, which did not come to Brazil'.<sup>91</sup> Neves e Souza suggested that *n'golo* was taken to Brazil via the slave port of Benguela, and commented on the transformation of the social context:

The slaves of the Southern tribes who went there [to Brazil] through the trading post of Benguela took along their tradition to fight with the feet. With time, what was initially a tribal tradition was



Figure 2.5 An Angolan *berimbau* player. Drawing by A. Neves e Souza, 1965, from...*Da minha África e do Brasil que eu vi...* (Luanda: n.p., n.d.). Courtesy of the National Library, Lisbon.

transformed into a weapon of attack and defence, which helped them to survive in a hostile environment. [This is the] reason for its continuity in the urban context. The worst bandits of Benguela are generally Muxilengues, which, in the cities, use the *N'golo* steps as a weapon. In Luanda, these steps, possibly brought from the South, are called *Bassula*. Even in the name there is something suggesting that the fight originated among the pastoral people of the South. *Ba-ssula*, those from the South.<sup>92</sup>

That the musical bow (known as *berimbau* in Brazil) was also widely used among the herdsmen of that whole region provided further evidence for Neves e Souza that *n'golo* was at the roots of capoeira. He conveniently overlooked the fact that this instrument was never associated with *n'golo* or any other combat game in Africa (see Figure 2.5). Câmara Cascudo went to Angola himself but was unable to see either the *n'golo* or the *bassula*. He heard descriptions while there and insisted that weapons, in particular knives, were never used in the athletic games. This allowed him to conclude that the Portuguese substantially reformed capoeira by introducing the use of weapons (jackknives and sticks)—a rather questionable deduction given the widespread use of daggers, fighting sticks and spears in African societies.

In his recent work T.J.Desch-Obi has further developed the *n'golo* hypothesis.<sup>93</sup> He uses a much wider range of sources—from colonial chroniclers to oral history—to draw his broad picture of *n'golo* as the great 'Bantu pugilistic tradition' from which capoeira Angola supposedly derived. There is no room here to comment extensively on all his findings and I will limit myself to the points that are most relevant for the history of capoeira. Although it is not made explicit in the references regarding his informants, his fieldwork concentrates on Quilengues, the area where Neves e Souza already identified the existence of movements

and traditions related to capoeira. Desch-Obi attempts to link the twentieth-century customs of a people of southwestern Angola, commonly referred to as Nyaneka-Nkumbi, to the military culture of the seventeenth-century Imbangala groups. For that purpose he renames the former 'Bangala', although this can lead to confusion with the actual Imbangala of Kassanje and will probably raise concerns among anthropologists and historians of Angola.

The origins of the warrior bands that called themselves Imbangala are uncertain and disputed among specialists. Described by colonial chroniclers as Jagas (this term refers to the title of their leader and by extension to the groups) the Imbangala played a crucial role in the wars that devastated Angola in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They took advantage of the growing weakness of the Mani Kongo and the struggle between the Portuguese and the Ndongo kingdom. The Imbangala systematically raided surrounding populations and moved on when there was nothing left to loot and for that reason are regarded as bandits by some historians.<sup>94</sup> Relations with colonizers were ambiguous and sometimes conflictual, but they often allied with the Portuguese and sold them slaves, or served in their armies. A number of historians see them therefore as instruments of Portuguese colonialism, rather than heroes of African resistance.<sup>95</sup> The Imbangala bands lived in military camps known as *quilombos*. What held a band together was not kinship relations, but initiatory rituals that allowed the Imbangala to recruit new members from different, surrounding ethnic groups. Warriors had to abide by rules known as *kixila* laws, which included symbolic and possibly concrete forms of cannibalism and infanticide. Desch-Obi points out that the Imbangala did not have access to superior weapons, but used similar arms as their enemies: bows, knives, swords and war clubs. The Imbangala's military success was thus due to their 'martial culture that included disciplined military training' and their adherence to these 'brutal codes of behaviour'.<sup>96</sup>

After having caused destruction some Jaga chiefs eventually settled down and founded states, and the Imbangala warriors merged with surrounding populations. The most important were the kingdoms of Kasanje in the east, which played an important role in providing slaves to the Portuguese, and the kingdoms of Bie, Wambu and Bailundu in the central highlands. Further south the soba Kanina established the kingdom of Humbe Inene. Although some Imbangala customs were transmitted and eventually survived into later periods, southwestern Angola underwent many further changes during subsequent times that resulted in major cultural transformations and a substantial redefinition of existing ethnic groups. During the so-called Nano Wars in the nineteenth century, for example, the area of Quilengues was frequently plundered by bandits that stuck to the predatory behaviour of the Jagas. Yet the Nano bandits used firearms, which undoubtedly contributed to their military superiority over other groups in the area.<sup>97</sup> At least from that moment on, older fighting techniques and the games that supposedly developed these skills must have lost their efficacy and attraction.

Desch-Obi ignores all these changes in his overall characterisation of 'Bangala social systems' for which no chronological framework is given. His account relies heavily on the work of Carlos Estermann, an Alsatian missionary who spent many years in the area and provided the most detailed insights into the customs of the Nyaneka-Nkumbi group, but only in the 1950s.<sup>98</sup> In what constitutes one of the most innovative parts of his work, Desch-Obi then describes 'Engolo in Bangala Society', which merges the well-known account by Neves e Souza with ground-breaking new information gathered during his fieldwork in Quilengues in the 1990s. He explains that the preliminary open-hand combat game *kaneka* (which Neves e Sousa called *liveta*) still of ten precedes contemporary *engolo* matches, and that *kandeka* often uses *engolo* songs to urge on its combatants.<sup>99</sup> He explains that *kandeka* takes place in a circle of boys and adult men, and that the music consists 'of a steady clapped rhythm while individual fighters take turns leading call and response songs' which 'serve to encourage the fighters and ridicule those who do not show bravery in *kandeka*'.

Once the music has taken hold of the crowd, a fighter will enter the circle and raise his open hands above his head as a challenge to the present. Another fighter, normally one who feels he is close to or above the skill of the challenger, will enter the circle with dance-like steps and raise his open hands, palms forward, demonstrating his guard. [...] Once partnered off the two fighters will attempt to slap each other in the face or body while dodging and blocking to keep the rival's blows from reaching their target. The encounter often turns into a hailstorm of attempted blows and normally ends when one person lands a blow clean enough to dissuade his rival from continuing.<sup>100</sup>

The *kandeka* matches eventually end up in wrestling, with one fighter throwing the other to the ground. According to Desch-Obi's informants, this is frowned upon in many Bangala groups and considered 'poor form'. It is worth noting that a related form called *onhandeka* was observed among Bantu groups in Namibia visited by Edwin Loeb during the 1940s. Yet among the Kuanyama, *onhandeka* consisted of knobkerrie stick fighting and was referred to as a former war dance—it had no relation to the puberty ceremonies (*efundula*) as would be suggested by the existence of a wider 'Bantu pugilistic tradition'. Although Loeb describes two other forms of wrestling, he does not mention any kicking or head butting, which again shows how different fighting techniques could be associated with the same ceremony in related Western Bantu societies.<sup>101</sup>

According to Desch-Obi, the *engolo* takes place not only during the female and male puberty rites but also during other festivals and today also when well-known fighters from other regions are visiting an area. He highlights that *engolo* is more dangerous than *kandeka*, and for that reason 'even the most experienced fighters will only enter the *engolo* circle after drinking a substantial amount of *makau* (traditional fermented beer made from sprouting sorghum) to bolster their confidence'. He describes a match as follows:

The music begins with clapping and a rhythmic humming that can take the place of a response in the call-and-response songs that someone will begin to sing. Soon after the mantra-like song and humming has fully formed, with a shout a practitioner will enter the circle dancing and often shouting again to accentuate the techniques he begins to demonstrate. When a contender joins the challenger in the circle the two will continue to dance to the music as they square off and one adept will launch a kick or sweep at the other. This attack will be defended by dodging or 'blending' in such a way that will then allow the defender to launch a smooth counter-attack. The two will continue in a cycle of attacks, defenses, and counter-attacks in a smooth continuous flow.<sup>102</sup>

Desch-Obi also highlights that blocks are not used to avoid kicks, but rather acrobatic evasions. According to him trickery and cunning are central to contemporary *engolo* (as it is in capoeira). There are thus some important similarities with respect to basic capoeira movements and the *roda* (see Chapter 4), which have to be acknowledged. Yet we also need to look beyond formal resemblances and enquire about social contexts and cultural meanings. Desch-Obi asserts that wrestling did not exist as a social institution among the Ovimbundu and 'Bangala' (Nyaneka), but that striking arts such as *kandeka* and the *engolo* (*n'golo*) and its cognates were and are widely practised instead; and that related arts existed in the Kongo area.<sup>103</sup> This allows him to construct *engolo* as the dominant Bantu pugilistic tradition from which supposedly capoeira derived.

Following Neves e Souza, Desch-Obi maintains that rites of passage (the female *efico* or *efundula* and the male *ekwendje* or *etanda*) remain the main occasion for *engolo*. He furthermore asserts that 'the *engolo* also contradicts many of the pastoral socio-religious ideals' which supposedly do not apply in the circle where the art is performed. He sees that as evidence that *engolo* is linked to the warrior codes of the former

Imbangala.<sup>104</sup> With all due respect to the important fieldwork Desch-Obi carried out, I think that this like many other conclusions remains entirely unproven and rather seems to derive from his afrocentric bias to insist on African continuities and homogeneity despite contrary evidence.

If *n'golo* and its supposed cognates among other groups (for whose existence Desch-Obi does not provide one single piece of evidence) really constituted such a central institution in Western Bantu societies and have always represented a core aspect of puberty rituals, why have they not been described by others? Desch-Obi simply omits that the existing anthropological literature does not even acknowledge its existence and that Estermann, who witnessed and provided very detailed descriptions of puberty rituals among the Nyaneka, does not even mention *n'golo*, and only refers to wrestling among boys or other forms of fighting among related groups.<sup>105</sup> Other authors highlight different forms of combat and dances associated with rites of passage. The early twentieth-century description of the Ovimbundu by W.D. Hambly, for instance, only refers to wrestling among boys.<sup>106</sup> A more recent study on the Cabinda mentions dances and fights between boys and girls, rather than anything similar to *n'golo*.<sup>107</sup> The detailed study of the Bangala of the Upper Congo River by J.H. Weeks insists on the paramount importance of stick fighting to settle quarrels between families, towns and even entire districts.<sup>108</sup> All these accounts provide further evidence for the variety of combat games and traditions in the Kongo/Angola region.<sup>109</sup> They also lead us to raise a number of questions. How widespread was the use of kicking and head butts as a separate combat form before and during the centuries of Portuguese colonial rule? How did it evolve in recent years?

T.J. Desch-Obi seems to have overlooked one crucial reference from the Portuguese ethnographer Augusto Bastos, who wrote in his account of the Benguela district at the beginning of the twentieth century:

The Quilengues have an exercise, which they call *ómudinhu*. It consists in prodigious jumps in which they throw the legs into the air and the head downwards. It is accompanied by strong hand clapping.<sup>110</sup>

Bastos' description provides unique and strong evidence for the existence of a combat game with close formal resemblance to the kicks in capoeira, but he also seems to make clear that *ómudinhu* was very specific to the Quilengues, and not, as Desch-Obi assumes, widely and exclusively practised in the rest of the Benguela district.

The problem is that there are so many other possible ancestors for capoeira and the other combat games of Plantation America. In 1935, Artur Ramos was already drawing attention on the impact of ceremonial dances on Afro-Brazilian folklore and singled out the *cufuinha* from the Lunda as a possible ancestor of capoeira.<sup>111</sup> Contrary to most other twentieth-century accounts of combat games by European observers in areas already subjected to colonial rule, this war dance and mock combat has been described in its pre-colonial aspect, prior to the integration of the Lunda into the Portuguese Empire. We owe this account to Henrique de Carvalho, a Portuguese soldier, explorer and administrator charged with a diplomatic mission to the independent Central African state of Lunda, to obtain a treaty allowing Portuguese establishments in the area.<sup>112</sup> He reports that *cufuinha* happened on a number of occasions, such as affairs of war, proofs of courage, the distribution of honours and the distribution of posts. According to Carvalho, dancing and jumping on the tips of the toes figured prominently in *cufuinha*, as well as pantomime and mock combat:

The one who will dance, pulls his cloth up, tightening it between his belt and body so that the legs can move freely. He draws his big knife, holds it firm, and then, slightly crouching, with his legs bent and handling his knife from one side to the other, some times imitating stabs towards the ground, and turning his knife either upwards or downwards, dances in jumps, moving forward and backwards,



executing steps on the point the feet; all this with much speed, shouting, whistling, making gestures and contortions with his head, face and body, and assuming an air of ferocity.<sup>113</sup>

Since most of the ceremonial occasions for holding *cufuinha* disappeared after the dismembering of the Muatiânvua state, colonial subjugation was, once again, a key moment of rupture for combat game practices. So how seriously can we think of *cufuinha* as an ancestor of capoeira? The fact that Carvalho does not mention any kicks, but instead highlights the use of weapons (long knives) suggests that most techniques of attack in *cufuinha* were not that similar to capoeira. Yet the idea of a link convinced the pioneer capoeira scholar Edison Carneiro, who wrote to his friend and colleague Artur Ramos that he considered *cufuinha* the ‘remote origin of the capoeira’.<sup>114</sup> As it happens, Ramos’ suggestion has never been discussed since; otherwise instead of zebra symbols we would now have *cufuinha* logos inspiring contemporary capoeira groups.

Even though kicks seem not to have played a prominent role in the *cufuinha*, one can nevertheless acknowledge a number of other formal similarities with capoeira. It was a mock combat, carried out to the rhythm of drums and other percussion instruments. Their rhythm and the chants executed by lead singer and chorus framed the combat game. *Cufuinha* performers also made widespread use of rhythmic steps, gestures, and mimicry—features that also figure prominently in capoeira. What further forces us to consider the impact of the *cufuinha* tradition on capoeira is the fact that subjects of the Muatiânvua state were enslaved and sold into the Americas through the two slaving circuits of Benguela and Luanda long before formal colonial rule was established over the Lunda. The slave trade lasted until the 1860s, and Henrique de Carvalho could observe *cufuinha* practice only three decades later.

In summary then, Desch-Obi’s theory of a ‘monogenetic’ origin of capoeira presents a number of problems. He suggests that an essentially unaltered *n’golo* and its cognates derived from Imbangala warrior training (an assumption for which no documentary evidence exists), and that its formal aspects—such as the use of kicks and head butts—were intrinsically related to the particular ritual context of puberty rites. He furthermore links *n’golo* practice to a specific aspect of Bantu/Kongo philosophy, the ‘crossing of the Kalunga’.<sup>115</sup> Many Afrocentric adepts of capoeira Angola in the United States refer to a ‘traditional’ Kongo proverb that states: The hands are to build, the feet to destroy’.<sup>116</sup> This supposedly proves that inhabitants in the Kongo/Angola region rather used kicks and head butts instead of punches, wrestling or stick fighting. As I hope to have shown, this latter assumption is simply proven inaccurate by historical evidence, and we need to come up with a more sophisticated explanation about the link between fighting techniques, combat games and their wider context.

A brief look at *n’golo*’s likely cousins in the African Indian Ocean can help us better to understand the relative autonomy between fighting techniques, rituals and social context, and, ultimately, their cultural meaning. Edward L. Powe’s groundbreaking new research shows the range of techniques used in ‘traditional’ combat games in the islands of Comoros, Madagascar and Reunion. Although traditional wrestling also exists in some areas of Madagascar, the most important combat games in this region are *mrengé* (Comoros), *morengy* (Madagascar), and *moringue* (Réunion). As the similar names suggest, these three combat games are closely related.

*Mrengé*—identified by Powe as the oldest form—is a furious fight using fists, kicks, grabbing and head butts. Referees separate contestants when things get too rough. ‘This vicious fighting with intent to maim or kill’ also makes use of deceit such as throwing sand into the opponent’s face. Oral history asserts it derives from slaves’ pastimes. On Comoros it could also take the form of a mass fight between neighbourhoods. Matches were often held after the rice harvest and recent changes have seen the introduction of blows from other arts and the substitution of the orchestra of drums and flutes by electric bands.<sup>117</sup>

*Morengy* in Madagascar also counts on bare-knuckle boxing as a basic fighting technique. Many styles exist among the over 40 different ethnic groups of the island. The additional use of the feet is only permitted in some regions, for instance in the variety known as *watsa* on the northwestern coast. In some other areas only fighting with feet is permitted.<sup>118</sup>

*Moringue* was practised on the island of Réunion until the 1950s and was revitalized after 1989. It is also attributed to the slaves who came to the island to toil on French plantations. According to Jean-René Dreinaza, one of the island's authorities on the topic and the main person responsible for the art's recent re-emergence, *moringue* started with the clenched fist challenge, the earth ritual consisting of smearing mud or rubbing dust on one's body before fighting, and the ritual chest butt as a test of strength. Contrary to most of its cognates on Comoros and Madagascar, *moringue* only uses kicks, but not punches. Many of its movements strongly resemble those of capoeira. For instance, the strike with the heel of the foot, the *talon zirondelles*, corresponds to the technique known as the *rabo de arraia* in capoeira. Powe acknowledges an original link with the local religion *maloya*, but also how the art became increasingly profane. Prize matches have thus been central to its practice. As in Brazil, the social background of *moringue* adepts expanded substantially during the nineteenth century to include other social and ethnic groups (Indians and the mixed population). The social context of *moringue* in former times also varied accordingly: sometimes it happened in front of a store, sometimes in the back of a market, in the ring destined for cockfights. It was perceived as a creole art and for that reason attacked by authorities and francophile elites.<sup>119</sup>

This cursory review of the main martial art form in the African Indian Ocean allows some conclusions. First, one has to acknowledge the variety of techniques: some variants use only fists, others only the feet and many use both resources. This is matched by the variety of social contexts and cultural meanings. Religion—if it once was—does not now seem to be a central feature in most cases, although combat games are preceded by rituals invoking spiritual protection. Prize-matches with referees instead seem to constitute the central aspect in all of them, and in many instances a modern band has replaced the original drums. Furthermore, the association of these arts with slaves in both Comoros and Réunion (and in Madagascar eventually with ethnic groups proceeding from Mozambique) suggests that *moringue* and *mrengé* are the result of the slave trade and the plantation economy. Despite their location in the Indian Ocean, these arts belong therefore to the combat games of the Black Atlantic. Like their Brazilian cognate capoeira, they are already creole developments. Thus once again, a rigid distinction between 'African' and 'creole' is not helpful for understanding their historical development.

This is also the case of *bassula*, another twentieth-century Angolan combat game for which some basic documentation exists. Câmara Cascudo, even though taking on board the theory of *n'golo* as the ancestor of capoeira, discussed *bassula*, practised by the Auxiluanda people, as another possible origin of the Brazilian martial art.<sup>120</sup> He even suggested that *bassula* might have derived from *n'golo*, although he admittedly never saw either of them performed, but only heard or read descriptions of combat games. The Axiluanda resulted from the 'centuries-old intermingling of Bantu cultures and peoples, mainly Bakongos and Kimbundus'.<sup>121</sup> They settled along the coast, in fishing villages from Barra do Dande to Corimba (now the Mussolo) isthmus. Popular at least until the 1960s along that section of the coast, and also in some *muceques* (slums) of Luanda, it faded away since independence (1975) and is now considered to be extinct. Recent iconographic sources suggest that *bassula* resembles more a type of wrestling, where opponents hold each other by the elbows or by the body. Movements include throws and immobilizations, but also capoeira-like *rasteiras*.

According to Mestre Kabetula, boys had to learn *bassula* from their fathers or relatives as a means to face challenges in their social or professional lives, for instance when fixing fish prices with Portuguese traders, or resisting assaults by Congolese fishermen. Weapons were also used in the fights, including truncheons,



machetes, and knives. During carnival real fights occurred between groups from rival dance teams. Under these conditions of street fighting, *bassula* was called *ji nvunda*, a Kimbundu term for conflict or fight. *Bassula de kissoko* represented another modality, 'just for fun and sport'. It was played between friends of the same *kissoko* (a group of close friends and relatives) as a form of entertainment, or during a familiar ceremony, for example between a father and his new son-in-law. Different fishing communities also organized tournaments between themselves.

Although some aspects of *bassula*—especially its social context—bear a resemblance to capoeira, it would be extremely hazardous to consider that art as an ancestor of capoeira. First of all, in terms of movements there is no great similarity, maybe with the exception of head butts. Furthermore *bassula* seems to be of recent origin, since the Axilunda are themselves a relatively modern ethnic group, the result of Bakongo and Mbundu (Kimbundu speakers) miscegenation. Furthermore, as fishermen living along the coast they were exposed to frequent contact with outsiders, such as sailors, from all over the world. Salas Neto for instance recognized the influence of Asian martial arts on contemporary *bassula*. Therefore to assume that *bassula* is an ancestor of capoeira just because it is or was practised in Angola seems to indulge in the stereotype of a strictly one-dimensional communication within the Black Atlantic, only from Africa to the Americas. Yet given the extended and frequent contacts between Luanda and the Brazilian ports since the time of the slave trade, one might as well conceive that it was rather capoeira that influenced *bassula*!

The multiplicity of fighting techniques in Africa corresponds to a bewildering variety of social contexts for combat games. In pre-colonial times, war dances and other highly ritualized contexts were central to their performance. With colonization, and the resulting loss of independent statehood, these contexts often lost their relevance—just as they did for enslaved Africans in the Americas.<sup>122</sup> Existing twentieth-century African combat games are thus as much the result of fundamental changes and developments as their New World cousins. Older, pre-colonial forms are unfortunately seldom documented and thus conclusive evidence of a monogenetic origin of capoeira is unlikely ever to appear. The comparison with other combat games in a plantation context might provide further elements to evaluate how capoeira developed. The similarity of contexts and resemblance of outcomes with respect to related combat games in the Americas can help us to assess to what extent capoeira was exceptional, and typically Brazilian.

### *Combat games in American plantation societies*

Since all slave-exporting areas in Africa sent captives to almost every region of Plantation America, one should not be surprised to find the basic combat techniques—stick fighting, fist fighting, kicking and head butting—in many different locations. Yet most captives from a specific region in Africa 'tended to flow in one dominant channel',<sup>123</sup> and therefore the existence of a combat modality in one region was, at least originally, closely linked to the pre-eminence of a particular African tradition. However, the massive presence of any particular ethnic group cannot be considered as the only decisive factor for the survival and development of these arts, since all of them either rapidly creolized (although in different ways and to diverse degrees) or disappeared altogether.

If the precise geographic distribution of African-derived combat games in the Americas is, due to the lack of sources, difficult to reconstruct for the period of slavery, there is no doubt that from a relatively early stage slaves were fond of combat games. The earliest detailed account is probably from Richard Ligon in seventeenth-century Barbados. He described slaves wrestling on Sunday afternoons in between dancing sessions; sometimes two or three couples being engaged at the same time.

When they have danc'd an hour or two, the men fall to wrestle, (the Musick playing all the while), and their manner of wrestling is to stand like two Cocks, with heads as low as their hips; and thrusting their heads one against another, hoping to catch one another by the leg, which sometimes they do: But if both parties raise their heads, by pressing hard one against another, and so having nothing to take hold of but their bare flesh, they close, and grasp one another about the middle, and have one another in the hug, and then a fair fall is given on the back.<sup>124</sup>

A similar context is mentioned by Charles Leslie in eighteenth-century Jamaica. He possibly even observed slave women not merely watching but partaking in combat games: 'Sunday Afternoon the Generality of them dance or wrestle, Men and Women promiscuously together.'<sup>125</sup> Slaves' wrestling and cudgelling is also mentioned by John Stedman in Surinam.<sup>126</sup> It was also practised in the nineteenth-century pre Civil War South of the United States, where planters sometimes arranged contests between slaves.<sup>127</sup> Despite these sources attesting its existence in different regions, African-derived wrestling as a formalized martial art has not survived in the Americas.

Stick fighting constituted the most widespread combat game in the Caribbean and was also practised in Brazil. The male slaves' predilection for stick fighting has been reported since the late colonial period. It was (and often still is) practised on a number of islands, regardless of its colonial master: Trinidad, Carriacou, Dominica, Haiti and probably many others. Moreau de Saint-Méry provided us with a crucial eighteenth-century description for the French colony Saint Domingue (Haiti). According to him, slaves used fighting sticks under two circumstances: in real fights between themselves, or in friendly contests ('une espèce de lutte' or 'joute'). Sticks were made of extremely hard wood for use in the second modality, the lower third being covered with leather and decorated with golden nails.

The negroes handle this stick with great dexterity, and as they target the head, the blows are always serious. Therefore the fighters are soon covered with blood, and it is not easy to separate them when they are infuriated...<sup>128</sup>

As a combat game, stick fighting was strictly regulated. A new fighter replaced the loser and the ultimate winner earned a prize. An eighteenth-century engraving from the island of Dominica (see [Figure 2.6](#)) shows that this kind of event was attended by slaves or freed persons of different age and both sexes. The game provided an occasion for good fighters to show off:

[...] this mortal stick also serves to exhibit one's adroitness, in a type of fight. One cannot prevent oneself admiring how fast the blows are given and avoided by two well-trained negroes. They threaten each other, they turn around to take each other by surprise, always holding and moving the stick with both hands; suddenly a blow is given, the other stick blocks, and the strikes are imparted and answered alternatively, until one of the combatants is hit by the other.<sup>129</sup>

As in Africa, the ritual invocation of spiritual forces was important in colonial Haitian stick fighting. Combat only started 'after each negro has wetted his finger with saliva, passed it along the ground and touched again his tongue, and beating his breast with his hand, raising his eyes towards the sky, he has, in his own opinion, uttered the most horrible of all oaths.'<sup>130</sup> Saint-Méry reports that police did forbid the use of sticks, but their confiscation was to no avail since they were so easy to replace. His testimony and the engraving by Brunias also seem to suggest that some masters enjoyed watching stick fight contests.



Figure 2.6 Stick fighting was popular among slaves in many Caribbean plantation colonies. 'Bataille entre un nègre français et un nègre anglais dans l'île St Dominique'. Eighteenth-century engraving by A. Brunias. Courtesy of Dr M. Chatillon, Paris.

A similar distinction between friendly games and real confrontations was and is still made on the Spanish American mainland. Stick fighting is documented since at least the early nineteenth century in Venezuela. The sugar cane area of El Tocuyo in the former province of Barquisimeto, now Lara state, is one of the core regions for its practice. Here 'stick playing' (*jugar palo*) is closely associated with the worship of St Anthony and the seven dances executed after the procession known today as Tamunangue. Slave origins of the manifestation are evident from rhythms and instruments, such as the *cumaco* drum. Dancers and stick fighters call each other—regardless of their 'real' colour—*negro or negra*.<sup>131</sup> As with capoeira, the Venezuelan practice of stick fighting spread to the poor mestizo population, but in contrast to Brazil, its practice remained largely a rural phenomenon.

Stick fighting experienced an extraordinary development in Trinidad after emancipation, when it became associated with carnival. The island only developed into a fully-fledged plantation society after the Spanish crown offered French planters settlement on the island with their slaves, in 1783. French creole culture remained dominant even after the English took over Trinidad, in 1797. Peter Mason asserts that

In the early days of slavery almost every plantation in Trinidad had its own *gayelle* or stickfighting ring, where fighters would do battle with their 4–5 foot long sticks of hard poui wood, driven by the sound of drums and the singing of the early *chantwells*. Much African mystique and spirituality surrounded stickfighting; 'bois men' (from the French 'bois' for wood) were known to bury their sticks in dead relatives' graves and to leave them there three or four days until they were infused or 'mounted' with their spirit.<sup>132</sup>

After slave emancipation, stick fighting contests took place during carnival, often arranged by a wealthy sponsor. During the 1840s, *calinda*, a 'combination of stick-fighting and dancing' is first mentioned in sources.<sup>133</sup> What so far had been practised only in the context of plantation and village contests was adopted by the growing urban lower class living in the barrack yards of Port of Spain. Soon a dozen yard bands emerged, very similar to the capoeira gangs in Rio de Janeiro, grouping men and some women from

particular neighbourhoods. Each band had its champion fighters, or *calinda kings* and *queens* since some women also took part in fights. According to Bridget Brereton,

The male stick-fighters were dressed in a silk shirt, long trousers with coloured buttons, a ribbon or sash at the waist, and red scarves round the wrists. To accompany the stick-fights, special *kalinda* songs were composed and sung by the band *chantwelles* (folk artists who led the bands), songs which boasted of the band's achievements in past battles and challenged rival stickmen to fight. They were in minor key, usually in patois, with the *chantwelles* singing the stanzas and the followers shouting out the refrain. At first, the songs were all accompanied by drums, and special drum codes were worked out to tell fighters when to give a certain kind of blow, or when to retreat.<sup>134</sup>

During carnival, in particular during the Canboulay procession, rival bands often started to fight each other. State intervention in the 1870s culminated in the infamous battle between stick fighting bands and police during the 1881 carnival, leading to the prohibition of Canboulay and any large assembly of stickmen in 1884. Trinidadian stick fighting further creolized (or, more precisely, 'douglarized') when thousands of Indian migrants came to Trinidad in the second half of the nineteenth century, introducing their own stick fighting styles. However, in recent years stick fighting has significantly declined, despite attempts by the National Carnival Commission to revive it.<sup>135</sup>

The development of stick fighting in Trinidad—so far the best-documented Caribbean martial art—offers a number of important parallels with capoeira: the emphasis on synchronization between drummer and fighter, rhythm and movements, the emergence of a specific, creolized ritual including challenge songs and the constitution of gangs in an urban environment. There are also some important differences between the two arts: unlike capoeira, the emphasis in stick fighting was less on playing, but more on achieving victory, attained when the opponent's head started to bleed. Furthermore, the urban context acquired significance only at a later stage in Trinidad, whereas in Brazil, it seems to have been associated with capoeira from its very beginning.

*Maní*, a combat game using fist fighting seems to have been widespread in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Cuba, especially in the central areas of the island where sugar cane was grown. Fernando Ortiz, to whom we owe the only detailed description, defined *maní* as 'consisting fundamentally in boxing, during which the player who is dancing tries to knock down one of the various participants, who remain on the defensive, and form a circle around him'.<sup>136</sup> It is usually referred to as a game, but also as a dance. In the province of Las Villas it was also known as *bambosá*.

One game could have up to 20 participants, who made bets before the game started. Chance decided who would be the first in the middle of the circle. Each player had his arms free, and balanced forward and backward on his feet, with his legs wide open touching those of his neighbours. When the dancer in the middle managed to hit one of the circle, so that he fell or left the circle, he was disqualified. Each *manisero* had to keep on the defensive, and could only avoid or block the blows of the dancer:

The *maní* dance had no specific choreography. The dancer made the most varied and elegant figures and changes with his gestures, steps and leaps, in order to show off and distract the individuals of the circle, to mislead them over his intentions and take them by surprise.

*Maní* was always played during daytime and on 'dead earth'. Various modes of playing existed: in the 'clean *maní*' contenders were only bare skinned. In the 'grease *maní*' (*con grasa*) they lubricated their upper body, their arms and head with butter, which made the blows less powerful and resulted in less severe

injuries. *Maní* was played with or without a kind of glove (*muñeca*). No *manísero* knew for sure whom the dancer would strike next, and in these feints and deception—reaching out for the nearest but hitting the one furthest away resided one of the game's main attractions. If the dancer in the middle failed to hit a player, he lost and had to leave his privileged post to the one who had managed to avoid his blow. Once there were not enough players left to close the circle, the *maníseros* formed a semi-circle in front of the drums, with the dancer in the middle between them and the percussion. At that stage the players were called cockerels (*gallos*). In the final part one *gallo* imparted blows against the only other player left, until one won the contest and was declared the overall champion.

Two or three drums and a metallic bell (similar to the *agogô* used in Brazilian *candomblé* and capoeira) accompanied *maní* movements. The drummers could participate in the game. They played 'slow traditional rhythms', to which the dancer in the middle of the circle and the other *maníseros* sang *puyas* and *estribillos*. The chief drummer had to watch the game with great care, because he had to mark the blow struck by the dancer in the middle with a special, harder beat, imitating thus the sound produced by the *manísero's* hit. Here resided another crucial subtlety of the game. If the chief drummer failed, he had to leave his post, which was taken over by somebody else. Ortiz noted that this synchrony between the playing of the drum and the steps and gestures of the dancer was also characteristic of the *rumba brava*. This, in his view, confirmed that *rumba* and *maní* were both of Yoruba, and more particularly, Gangá origins. He observed that songs were sometimes 'en lengua', that is, in an African language, although generally in creolized Spanish so that everyone, the Africans from different nations, the creoles and the whites, could understand them. The songs consisted of verses chanted by a lead singer, answered by the chorus of *maníseros* and the larger audience. They were often improvised, and as in capoeira, helped to stimulate or provoke the players.

Blows had to be administered from the waist upwards ('de cintura parriba'), otherwise they were considered dishonest, resulting in 'bloody reprisals'. According to Ortiz, 'sometimes the good rules of the dance were forgotten and "bad blows" administered, "as you like", not only with the fists, but also feet and head, and targeting in this way face and torso or belly and groin'. But even when respecting the rules, the game was tough and required great resistance. There was a great risk of serious, even mortal injuries. For that reason a *maní* song advised: 'Who can't take the blows should not dare to enter but only watch from far away'.

Ortiz reports a softer and a harder modality of the game. In the former, a player was eliminated when he was forced to leave the circle, but in the tougher form of the game he only lost when he was knocked down. When Ortiz wrote his book, in the 1940s, *maní* was just played as a 'jolly parody', using gloves, without the blows being administered, and the strikes barely 'marked'. He advanced the hypothesis that *maní* had some magical meaning in Africa, but did not know if this was maintained in Cuba. He however emphasized that *maníseros* used to hide very powerful charms and amulets in their gloves or in their belts.

Frequently *maníseros* were organized in bands, and challenged collectively other groups. Games sometimes took place between groups from different plantations, often encouraged by the owners, who even organized the bands themselves. A few whites also became *maníseros*, for instance the military governor of Trinidad. During the nineteenth century, some slave *maníseros* made so much money that they could afford to buy their freedom. The game was occasionally repressed in the province of Las Villas, because it had generated many fights and was seen as responsible for crime. But according to Ortiz this was only temporary and local, and no legal general prohibition was ever implemented on the island.

Readers familiar with capoeira will have noticed a number of important similarities, including the close relationship between movements and rhythms and the leading role of the songs. Even if *maní* movements consisted primarily in a kind of boxing, this was, just as capoeira, embedded in a basic rhythmic step, and when it degenerated into an open fight, kicks similar to capoeira could be used. One key difference though is that

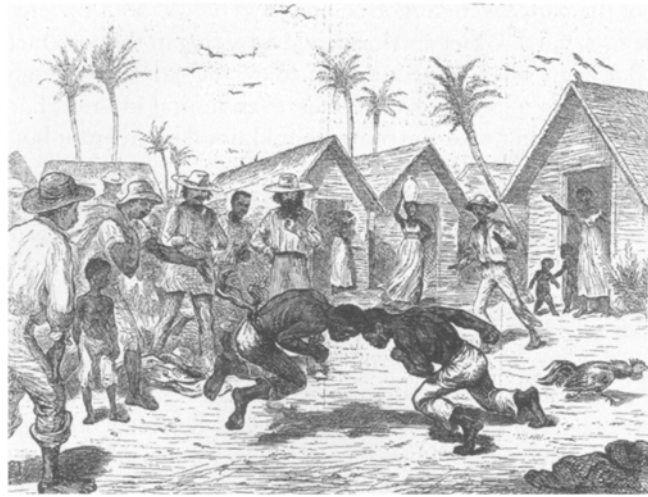


Figure 2.7 Africans and their descendants in the Americas used head butts in a range of combat games and fighting styles. 'A negro fight in South America' [Venezuela]. Engraving from *Harper's Weekly*, 15 August 1874. Frede Abreu Archive, Salvador

*maní* was mainly practised on Cuban plantations, not so much in the cities. That might explain why there are some explicit references to plantation slaves using similar techniques of avoiding blows when they decided to confront their masters. Thus, when 17 Lucumies (the Cuban designation for slaves of Yoruba origin) rebelled on the plantation Purísima Concepción in 1832, the overseer reported that he tried to subdue them with his machete,

[...] but I was not able to strike a blow, because the Negroes did not come straight forward, nor attacked, but were always jumping, dancing and administering blows with their machetes, it was not possible to confront one, because two or three appeared behind, and in such a manner that I could never wound one Negro [...]<sup>137</sup>

Techniques to avoid blows were thus not limited to captives from Kongo/Angola, experts in the art of *sanguar*, but seem to have constituted a more widespread skill among slaves from West Africa as well.

Despite its likely West African origins, *maní* offers a number of important parallels with capoeira, both in its formal aspects (played in a circle, with similar instruments, strikes embedded in a basic rhythmic movement) and its cultural meaning (multiple social functions, corresponding to the various modalities of the game, the role of 'witchcraft', and the importance of deception). These similarities support the view that African-derived combat games in Plantation America shared a number of common features independently of their West African or Central African origins, and that similar ritualized contexts could make use of quite different fighting techniques.

Eventually a single technique could be at the core of a particular type of combat. Head butting—an attack of paramount importance in capoeira—was used as an exclusive technique in a duel among two black free men in a village on the Venezuelan coast (see Figure 2.7). According to a newspaper report, the two were 'rivals for the affections of a dusky belle', and



[...] after screaming and jabbering at each other for nearly an hour, and keeping the whole neighbourhood in an uproar, suddenly stripped to the waist, and ran at each other like rams. [...] The two enraged men ran at each other with all their might, time after time, occasionally jumping into the air and striking their heads together with a crash distinctly audible across a square of considerable size.<sup>138</sup>

This description closely resembles the early account of capoeira by Johann Moritz Rugendas, who also does not mention any kicking technique.<sup>139</sup> We can thus not assume that head butting and kicking were always and inevitably linked. Yet they remained or became associated in three American combat traditions: knocking and kicking in the United States, *ladjia* in Martinique and capoeira in Brazil.

African-Americans in the United States engaged in wrestling, fist fighting and a third form called knocking and kicking. Although not much evidence remains for the time of slavery, knocking and kicking was practised in South Carolina and Virginia. After Abolition it was still used during public contests in intra-village competitions. It also seems to have played a role in African-American secret societies and might have found its way, although under a very altered form, into the revivalist Christian ring shouts. The clandestine nature of the societies prevented the spread of the art to wider audiences. Only recently have there been attempts to revitalize knocking and kicking. T.J.Desch-Obi emphasizes that South Carolina received a high proportion of Central African slaves, which would explain why the art was so prominent here, but then spread to ‘igboized’ Virginia.<sup>140</sup>

The combat game that bears the most striking similarities with the Brazilian capoeira is *Ladjia* (or *lagya*) from Martinique, which is also based on the prominent use of kicks and head butts. *Ladjia* also uses hand blows (as do most older forms of capoeira). It is generally taken for granted that *ladjia* developed under slavery. Since that early date it served not only as a tool of slave resistance, but also of social control. To keep in check their chattel, planters employed slave overseers with *ladjia* skills. The overseers were called *majò* (major) in creole, which became a term of respect for a skilled fighter.<sup>141</sup> As with stick fighting, planters occasionally encouraged their slaves to participate in *ladjia* contests that resulted in serious injuries or even deaths.<sup>142</sup> Unfortunately the earliest known description dates only from the 1930s, when the United States dancer Katherine Dunham visited the island and attended a *ladjia* contest in the southern fishing village of Vauclin.<sup>143</sup> According to her account two opponents confront each other, accompanied by a hand beaten drum, the percussion of the wooden *ti’bwa*, the lead singer and the chorus of the audience:

It is the player of *ti’bwa* (petit bois, or little wooden sticks) who sets the basic rhythm, the drummer, who indicates the movements of the dance—the advance and the retreat, the feints, the sudden whirls and lightning-like leaps in the air to sharp drops flat on the ground.

Thus, as with *maní* and capoeira, constant interaction between the musicians and the fighters is also an important aspect of *ladjia*. Dunham’s description of a contest between Alcide and Tel’mach also mentions a ‘basic movement’ that strongly recalls the basic capoeira step, the *ginga*:

then they face each other, ten feet or so apart, and, arms in the gesture of boxing, begin a slow rocking motion on half-bent knees, legs wide apart. This is the basic movement of the *ag’ya*. All else is variation and gesture and pantomime, with much improvisation.<sup>144</sup>

The movements she describes—which can also be seen in a short film made on the occasion—document the similarity of bodily techniques in *ladjia* and capoeira, from the ‘elaborate prancing’ between attacks, the

falling on two hands and going to the ground to avoid strikes, and the fast kicking similar to a *rabo de arraia* in capoeira. Dunham concluded that

The fascination of the real ag'ya lies not in the lust of the combat, but in the finesse of approach and retreat; the tension which becomes almost a hypnosis, then the flash of the two bodies as they leap into the air, fall in a crouch, and whirl at each other in simulated attacks, only to walk nonchalantly away, backs to each other, showing utter indifference before falling again into the rocking motion which rests them physically but excites them emotionally.

She witnessed what was, or had become, more than a mere combat game: a martial art. *Ladjia* took place on Saturdays on plantations, after workers received their wages, and just like capoeira, during the festivals dedicated to patron saints.<sup>145</sup> According to Dunham, during the 1930s *ladjia* was still danced 'on all feast days or at any slightest provocation whatsoever' in every single village or hamlet of the island, whereas 50 years later, it was only practised by a few men. She also distinguished various modalities, some more violent, others more geared towards a show for the audience. The term *ladjia* itself was mainly used for real combat, whereas *danmyé* rather denominated the friendlier modalities and shows. Despite the limited size of the island, several local styles with different techniques and designations such as *ronpoin* or *kokoyé* developed.

Since there is no doubt that *ladjia* is the combat game most closely related to capoeira, it is worth enquiring what explanations have been advanced about its origins. Katherine Dunham suggested that the roots of *ladjia* lie in the Nigerian wrestling match, celebrated in the spring festival to the Earth Mother—although she does not offer much justification for her claim. Robert Farris Thompson, in his precursor article on black martial arts of the Caribbean called *ladjia* an 'intensely creolized, Kongo-related martial art', but the only evidence he offered of the Congo origins is that one quarter of the slaves brought to Martinique came from Angola and that the term is supposedly of Congolese origin.<sup>146</sup>

Josy Michelon, author of the most detailed study on the topic, came up with a completely different explanation. After carrying out field study in Benin, she concluded that *ladjia* from Martinique derived from *kadjia*, the traditional fight performed by the Basantché people during the annual yam festival in the province of Atacora. Her argument again relies on etymology, and is grounded on her discovery of *kokoulé*, a similar combat game among the neighbouring Kotokoli. The 'literal analogy' between *kadjia/ladjia* and *kokoulé/kokoyé*, she argues, is so striking that these two African contests are the most likely ancestors of *ladjia* and *kokoyé*.<sup>147</sup> But despite the existence of a similar type of challenge prior to the fight, her detailed description of these two African combat games rather reveals not only another social context but also very different types of movements. *Kadjia* and *kokoulé* consist in wrestling and use no kicks (at least in Michalon's description). She also offers no systematic comparison of movements, rituals and other contextual aspects that would support her claim, only underlining that both *kadjia* and *ladjia* enhance flexibility, strength, dexterity and endurance.

The conflicting theories about the African origins of *ladjia* should alert us to the volatility of genealogical exercises and the abuse of etymological 'evidence'. T.J.Desch-Obi concedes that *ladjia* is a creole art form, merging various fighting techniques from West and Central Africa, but still insists that 'its major techniques, overall rules, and aesthetics all conform to the Bantu system'. His argument is that 'West African wrestling form played very little part in the artform prior to *ladjia* incorporation of other African-derived artforms in the first half of the twentieth century' and that West African styles 'all clearly fall under the category of combat sport', whereas in 'the Bantu pugilistic tradition, victory is attained through aesthetics, [...] there are no defined winners and losers.'<sup>148</sup> I agree with Desch-Obi that knocking and kicking, *ladjia* and capoeira use the most closely related techniques within Plantation America, probably



derived from Central African practices. Yet there is not much evidence regarding the incorporation of different techniques into modern *ladjia* styles to support his view, and none at all for the crucial formative period of slavery. Furthermore, as crucial as the distinction between a mere combat game and a more complex martial art might be, nothing allows us to establish a clean separation between West African sports and Bantu martial arts. As I have tried to show, most combat forms practised by slaves and their descendants could assume different meanings according to the context. The political and social context ultimately shaped not only their formal aspects, but also their cultural meaning, from a planter-sponsored match to a friendly game in a ritualized context. In other words, it is about time to abandon the strictly 'monogenetic' approach, which believes in 'Bantu essence' being transmitted through ages. An approach that acknowledges the multiple influences upon Afro-American combat games and emphasizes the creolization process is, I believe, ultimately far more convincing.

### *Combat games in Brazil*

Even the most superficial overview of fighting techniques and combat games practised in different historical contexts in Africa reveals their diversity in all the regions from which slaves were deported to the Americas. Ritual combat was embedded in various ceremonial contexts and fulfilled a range of different social functions, from puberty rites in a community to state ceremonials. Unfortunately we lack detailed records for combat games practised at the time of the slave trade to understand fully their meaning in each specific context. The information available on these aspects usually concerns relatively contemporary manifestations, which have changed as much as their New World counterparts and can therefore not be taken as their close 'ancestors', but should rather be seen as their distant 'cousins'.

Nevertheless, the close association of combat movements with rhythm, music, pantomime, dance and singing appears as one common denominator of most, if not all, known combat games practised by slaves and their descendants. A number of important formal continuities regarding instruments, rhythms, movements, rituals and the invocation of magic powers characterize slave combat games in Plantation America. In that respect one certainly ought to speak of African-derived manifestations, which all explore the synchronization between rhythms and movements. Yet their survival—and we have seen that many did not manage to survive to the present day—also depended on their capacities of adaptation and change. As with *candomblé* and *batuque*, the existence of related forms, reflecting structural similarities within major culture areas—for instance West African wrestling—could contribute to the emergence of broader, creolized manifestations that merged more specific traditions. In that respect the formation of Afro-American combat games was akin to the development of Afro-American religions.

Although not much historical evidence exists, foot-fighting techniques seem to have been restricted to West and East Central Africa and Madagascar. Yet in the case of almost universal combat techniques such as stick fighting there was no necessity for such a specific culture-area provenance. In both cases creole slaves unacquainted with specific African traditions could learn and practise them without necessarily adhering to their original meanings.

The new social context of chattel slavery also resulted in fundamental changes that affected not only fighting techniques or musical accompaniment, but also and above all, their cultural meaning. Combat games were no longer held for the same reasons and lost many of their former functions. War dances might have been used under the exceptional circumstances of slave rebellion, but did not constitute a continuous tradition that entered popular culture in the Americas—at least not with that meaning. It is therefore important to acknowledge not only the new social contexts, but also the new cultural meanings that developed in plantation societies, even if the latter are often hard to specify for the period of slavery.

Slaves from different origins practised combat games throughout Plantation America in their free time, mainly on Sunday afternoons or during festivals such as carnival. They practised them alongside other ‘pastimes’ such as playing music and dancing. What were friendly games in this context acquired new meanings when contests became more serious: to settle a dispute, to prove one’s honour or to win a prize. Prize matches for masters, in particular, would not allow for many of the original African meanings to be passed on, even though they might help to keep alive a specific type of combat technique. Even when used as a weapon in fights, combat techniques acquired new meanings given that conflicts in plantation societies were of a different order to those of pre-colonial or contemporary Africa.

Hence, in the Americas, the combat techniques practised by slaves were usually known as ‘games’ that were ‘played’ and were not perceived—as in Africa—as primarily ceremonial dances or state rituals. They still fulfilled important functions in the slave community. Even though they served recreational purposes they certainly had deeper meanings than just pastimes. Combat games could help to reconstitute a community, to settle disputes or to re-affirm ethnic pride in a society that discriminated against the slaves’ original cultures. Slaves also relied on their beliefs and magical practices for best performances, although we have no evidence that creole combat games were always closely or exclusively linked to one particular religious practice as it had been in Africa. If many made use of ‘witchcraft’ to support their strength, this was not necessarily an intrinsic part of any game, and thus the relationship between both could be loosened over time without affecting the practice. Therefore, despite the important links with religion to be examined in more detail for capoeira, it appears that most combat games in Plantation America were not considered an intrinsic part of a specific religious practice. Some combat games in the diaspora, however, were embedded in wider religious manifestations, such as the stick fighting in the procession for St Anthony in Venezuela or capoeira played during celebrations for Bahian saints (see [Chapter 4](#)). They therefore could constitute an aspect of a complex expression of popular culture that went beyond the narrow limits of a mere combat game. As we are going to see, this also applies to capoeira and might be one reason for its survival.

A striking analogy among Afro-American combat games is the coexistence of different modalities using similar techniques in different contexts: friendly game, rougher competition, or real fight. As has been suggested for capoeira,<sup>149</sup> this ‘strategic ambivalence’ between various modalities probably constitutes a key heritage of slavery, since it does not seem to have featured prominently in African combat games. We will need to pay particular attention to this when dealing with capoeira, and as well as comparing this with the modalities, or styles existing in other martial arts.<sup>150</sup> The examples of stick fighting and *ladja* suggest that circularity and mutual borrowing existed between different combat games and question the belief in a necessary single origin for any of them.

We can now attempt to sketch briefly the situation in Brazil before examining, in the next chapters, the development of capoeira in more detail. Although no evidence is available so far for the early colonial period, later sources attest the existence of not only one, but various combat games in Brazil. The Bavarian painter Rugendas, who provided us with very detailed descriptions of slave culture, observed slaves stick fighting during the 1820s:

It is also necessary to mention a sort of military dance: two troops armed with poles stand in front of each other, and the skill consists for each to avoid the thrusts that the adversary strikes at him.<sup>151</sup>

Stick fighting and dancing has survived well into the twentieth century through manifestations such as the *maculêlê* in Bahia and the *maneiro pau* in Ceará.

Undoubtedly the most prominent of all combat games in Brazil was and is capoeira. It is mentioned in the nineteenth-century sources of many provinces: Pará, Maranhão, Pernambuco, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro and São

Paulo. Even though not always described in detail, evidence suggests that each region had its specific variant, which differed from others with respect to musical instruments, fighting techniques and rituals. It is thus correct to consider nineteenth-century capoeira, similar to *batuque*, not as a precisely delimited genre but rather as a generic term used for a wide range of practices associating percussive music with fighting contests or mock combat. Each regional variant was shaped by specific African inputs (which changed over time according to the trends of the slave trade) and the particular local context.

The now extinct *batuque* represents a further manifestation that associated dance and wrestling techniques. This was different from the general dance in a circle examined above. The term *batuque* also stood for a contest accompanied by similar instruments to those used in *samba* or capoeira: drums, tambourines, *berimbaus* and other instruments of percussion. The contest started when a man in the middle challenged another from the circle around him to play. Once someone had accepted the challenge, they faced each other, moving according to the rhythm of the orchestra and the hand clapping of the audience. Then the other stood firm whilst the challenger tried to make him fall by using a range of techniques aimed to unbalance: *rapa*, *baú*, *banda lisa*, *encruzilhada*. *Batuque* and its many regional variants (known as *pernada*, *bate-coxa*, *samba duro*, *batuque-boi*) were popular in many coastal regions of Brazil. Peculiar to *batuque* were techniques such as the clashing of the upper legs (*baú*), and leg wrapping techniques (perhaps similar to Igbo wrestling). As in so many combat games of the Black Atlantic, *batuque* existed in various modalities. In more antagonistic contests participants always sought victory, and these usually ending with a clear winner, or in a draw. But *batuques* held during carnival usually put more emphasis on the dance.

Unfortunately the earliest descriptions of *batuque* only date from the first half of the twentieth century, when a process of reciprocal influence with capoeira was well under its way. Innovators such as Burlamaqui in Rio de Janeiro and by M.Bimba, creator of the 'Regional' capoeira style adopted many *batuque* techniques (see Chapter 5). For that reason probably some observers interpreted *batuque* as a 'modality' (Câmara Cascudo) or a 'variation' (Édison Carneiro) of capoeira, not as an entirely independent art. In fact it was more what Carneiro called a 'complementary activity'. In similar ways to the stick fighting dance *maculêlê*, which is used today as a warming-up exercise or as an additional resource for capoeira shows, *batuque* was gradually absorbed by the capoeira. Carneiro observed in the 1930s that the *negros de Angola* were the champions of *batuque*, and that one of the most well-known among them was called Angolinha ('little Angola').<sup>152</sup> Clearly *batuque* was a combat game of predominantly Angolan origins. Yet despite similar orchestra and social context, it used quite different techniques from capoeira. Its existence in different modalities and locations clearly attests to both the strength and the heterogeneity of Central African pugilistic traditions, which were maintained and developed in Brazil. These were never limited to a single foot and head fighting form as some defenders of the *n'golo* thesis seem to believe.

The relationship between *batuque*, *samba*, capoeira and *candomblé* exemplifies the process of horizontal circulation and reciprocal borrowing that occurred between different, but related manifestations of slave culture in Brazil. Instruments, rhythms and entire songs were taken and adopted for other purposes.<sup>153</sup> The relationship between these dances, religion and capoeira also is entirely different from the way combat games were embedded into wider social and ritual practices in Africa. The close association between music bow (*berimbau*) and combat game in Bahian capoeira illustrates to what extent capoeira is more than a simple derivation of a single African practice. The music bow has never been associated with combat or even with religious rituals in Africa.<sup>154</sup> To place the *berimbau* at the heart of capoeira was clearly a New World invention—and a fairly recent one as we are going to see when examining the formation of capoeira in Rio de Janeiro and Bahia.

### 3

## Capoeiragem in Rio de Janeiro, *c.*1800–1930

Adam, Adam  
Where is Salomé, Adam?  
Salomé went for a walk  
(Capoeira song from the public domain, Bahia)

### **Rio, capital of a plantation empire**

Compared with the successful Portuguese captaincies of Pernambuco, Bahia or even São Paulo de Luanda in Angola, Rio de Janeiro represented a rather secondary colony during the initial centuries of colonization. The incipient sugar cane economy did not really take off here as it had in the Northeast. However, the discovery of mines in the distant interior started to change the destiny of the port city. For a long time, the Portuguese had been trying to discover precious metals in their colonial territories. In contrast to Spanish America, this did not happen until the very end of the seventeenth century. When in 1693–1695, gold prospectors finally hit upon deposits in riverbeds of present-day Minas Gerais, a veritable gold rush followed. The mining boom also impacted on the surrounding regions. Rio de Janeiro and some other ports on the nearest coast capitalized on the fast growing trade in foodstuff and other supplies to the mining region. Workers were the most important commodity the mine owners needed. African slaves—once again—provided the bulk of the labour force for the mines. Mining gave a further impetus to Brazilian slavery. The mining economy provided huge benefits, not only for the mine owners, but also for the Crown. The king of Portugal required miners to contribute one fifth of all precious metals to the royal treasury. Yet if the export of bulky wooden crates filled with sugar from the coastal regions was relatively easy to monitor, gold or diamonds mined in the distant hinterland were more likely to escape fiscal control. Since only a very limited number of royal officers patrolled the vast interior of the colony, smuggling of gold and diamonds expanded swiftly. The problem of tax evasion and the difficulties in effectively inspecting the mining area showed the weakness of the Portuguese colonial state and was a cause of increasing concern. One of the measures designed to improve control over the territory and inhabitants was the transfer of the capital of the Viceroyalty of Brazil from Salvador da Bahia to Rio in 1763. This, in effect, acknowledged the growing role of Rio de Janeiro in the mining economy.

Higher sugar prices during the late eighteenth century, following decades of depression, encouraged the expansion of sugar plantations in the province of Rio, more particularly in the region of Campos dos Goitacases and the lower Paraíba valley. The boom was further fostered by the disruption of sugar production in the Caribbean, due to wars and the Revolution in Saint Domingue/Haiti (1791–1804). The number of sugar mills in the province of Rio rose from 323 in the 1770s, to 400 in 1810, and again to 700 in

1828. As a result of sugar's continued reliance on slave labour, half of the region's 170,000 inhabitants in 1789 were slaves, three quarters of whom lived in rural areas. Though over half of them worked on estates with more than 40 slaves, many others toiled on smaller units, usually dedicated to the production of foodstuff to supply the city and port of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>1</sup> The growing diversity of agriculture in the province of Rio de Janeiro reflected and sustained the development of its capital city.

If Rio de Janeiro acquired a more urban character after the arrival of the viceroy and his entourage in 1763, this was nothing compared with the transfer of the entire Royal Court from Lisbon in 1808. Escorted by the British navy, *grandees* and lesser noblemen, accompanied by their families, civil servants and domestics, embarked in Lisbon to escape the imminent arrival of Napoleon's troops. It is estimated that around 15,000 people from Lisbon disembarked in Rio de Janeiro, many to never return to Europe with the king in 1822. Much has been said about how this 14-year-residence of the Portuguese royal family in the wealthiest colony of the Empire shaped Brazil's path towards independence. Days after his arrival, the prince-regent, João VI, opened the colony's ports—hitherto subjected to the monopoly of colonial trade with Portugal—to free trade with 'friendly nations', principally Great Britain. Many other colonial restrictions—establishing manufactures or printing books—were also lifted. Brazil therefore experienced some economic benefits of independence before formally acquiring it in political terms in 1822.

This singular transmigration of a European court to the tropics has attracted considerably less attention in terms of its significance for local society and urban culture. Until then, a tiny layer of bureaucrats, the sugar planters of the captaincy who resided in the city, and the wealthy merchants constituted the Cariocan elite.<sup>2</sup> The last group was mainly engaged in the transatlantic trade, exporting colonial commodities, importing slaves and a wide range of European goods, from tools for agriculture to luxury items. The newly disembarked Portuguese nobles had to come to terms with this established elite. According to a recent study, their strategy consisted in a 'rigid orchestration of ceremonials' to impose their hegemony on local society.<sup>3</sup> Despite conflicts with the native Brazilian and the established resident Portuguese elite, these two groups in the end accepted not only these requirements of etiquette, but even sponsored the costly expenses of the court, in return for titles of nobility and other *ancien régime* privileges.

Sophisticated European court life contrasted sharply with the social reality of a tropical colony. The city had already become a pivot in the transatlantic slave trade and would continue to be so until 1850: almost one million African slaves were disembarked in Rio during the first half of the nineteenth century. Many were sold to plantations in the interior. Thousands, nevertheless, remained, and transformed Rio de Janeiro into the city with the largest captive population in the Americas: almost 80,000 slaves lived there in 1849. Despite the substantial migration of metropolitan Portuguese prior to independence, the proportion of slaves in relation to the total population of the city rose, from 34 per cent in 1799 to 46 per cent in 1821. This development took place in a period which historians of the Atlantic world usually refer to as the 'Age of Emancipation'. Since the free black and coloured represented another 20 or 30 per cent of its inhabitants, non-whites always constituted a large majority of around two-thirds of the city's total population.<sup>4</sup> As many travellers observed, the streets of the new capital were crowded with Africans. Many likened Rio to an African city.

Urban slavery presented a number of peculiarities when compared with plantation labour. Slaves in the city executed a much wider range of tasks. They worked as gardeners and looked after animals in smaller estates (*chácaras*) on the outskirts of the city. Others were domestics at the disposition of their owner. They toiled as boatmen and sailors, helping to transport goods and persons. Porterage was one of the main slave occupations in Rio, usually carried out in groups for the transport of bulky items. Porters made use of drums and songs to work more quickly and harder. The use of porters was widespread, since even refuse and excrement had to be carried out of the town houses and emptied on the beaches on a daily basis. Many other

slaves worked as street vendors. Pedlars literally crowded the streets of Rio, selling food and many other objects. The exercise of a craft was a further important slave occupation implying a higher status. Slave artisans laboured in almost every skilled trade, especially in carpentry and masonry, but also as shoemakers or tailors. Some owners also forced their younger slaves into prostitution. Last but not least, slaves worked as artists, being employed by sculptors or painters, or playing in music bands.<sup>5</sup> The groups of musicians known as *barbeiros* (because many of them—free or slaves—worked as barbers) were crucial for the fusion of styles and the circulation of instruments from different traditions that has characterized Brazilian music ever since.<sup>6</sup>

What made urban slavery so different were its peculiar labour arrangements. In many activities, slaves enjoyed a relative freedom of movement, unimaginable on plantations. Slaves working in the streets were not under the permanent surveillance of an overseer. In some professions they even enjoyed more autonomy. Many owners made their slaves rent out their labour to others. Some of these ‘slaves for hire’ (*negros de ganho*) had to deliver a fixed sum to their owners at the end of the day, which meant they could earn more and keep the difference. This allowed *negros de ganho* to acquire their own *peculium*, and eventually even purchase their freedom. Given the variety of slave activities, and the different ranks or status associated with each of them, slaves formed no undifferentiated, homogenous mass. The slave’s position was furthermore determined by the status of his or her owner; a slave of a wealthy elite family, for example, benefited from the consideration due to his master. Since many urban slaves were not under permanent surveillance from an overseer, they were exposed to a more collective type of social control from the dominant white society—and this was precisely the terrain where capoeira was to play a crucial role.

Living conditions for slaves in Rio de Janeiro were, however, far from being good. Slaves had to live in overcrowded accommodations and they were exposed to the disastrous sanitary conditions that prevailed throughout the nineteenth century in the city. As a consequence, many slaves suffered from infectious-parasitic diseases such as tuberculosis and dysentery. They were also more exposed than plantation slaves to the epidemics that devastated Rio on many occasions. The city was ravaged by at least eight major epidemics of smallpox alone between 1825 and 1850.<sup>7</sup> As a result, mortality rates among the slave population in the cities could exceed those on the plantations.

Fear of black slaves haunted the European nobles, who disembarked in Rio less than 20 years after the insurrection which had destroyed another thriving sugar economy based on slavery in French Saint-Domingue, and killed all whites left on that part of the island. For decades, the ‘horrors of Haiti’ were part of the collective fears of wealthier Europeans, representing a sad lesson about the dangers of exporting liberal and revolutionary ideas to the colonies. The newly arrived Portuguese nobles found that they had to live in a world dominated—at least visually and numerically—by slaves, and endure the noisy manifestations of what Europeans considered a ‘brutish’ (*boçal*) culture.

In this context of intense cultural confrontation, capoeira is, for the first time, systematically mentioned in written sources. The whites in charge of the city’s security became increasingly concerned by the subversive potential of slaves ‘playing capoeira’. This does not necessarily mean that capoeira did not exist in previous decades. As Carlos Eugênio Soares pointed out, some of the patterns of urban slave resistance were already in place by the mid-eighteenth century. Slaves infringed restrictions imposed by owners and the town council, assembling at night, going on the rampage to settle accounts, and carrying blades or other weapons.<sup>8</sup> But to date, historians have found only one single eighteenth-century document that briefly mentions capoeira. Dating from 1789, it refers to the arrest of a mulatto slave called Adam, accused of being a *capoeira*.<sup>9</sup> Historically, this term denominates the practitioner—today called capoeirista—whilst *capoeiragem* is often used, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, for the practice itself.<sup>10</sup>

This silence of the sources regarding capoeira might be due to the fact that police surveillance was minimal prior to 1808, not carried out by professionals and not reported upon in a regular, bureaucratic fashion. Until then, the civilian watchmen in charge of vigilance had to request help from army or militia units if there was any threat to public safety. Yet the relatively low incidence of capoeira arrests in the 1810s could also indicate that *capoeiragem* only developed in the last years of the Viceroyalty. Hopefully future research into still unexploited sources will shed more light on this issue.

The transfer of the Portuguese court to Rio resulted in the creation, in 1808, of a Police Intendant and a professional police force, the Royal Police Guard. From the very beginning, police energy was directed at the repression of any behaviour considered 'unacceptable'. This included 'vagrancy , begging, curfew violation, disrespect to authority, verbal insult, unspecified disorderly conduct, and public drunkenness'—and, prominently among all these, capoeira.<sup>11</sup> The royal decree establishing the Police Intendancy granted it authority to punish minor offences in the following terms:

as there are crimes that require no punishment other than some correction, the Intendant may in such cases arrest such persons as deserve correction, keeping them imprisoned for a time judged by the Intendant as proportional to the disorder committed, and as seems necessary for correction.<sup>12</sup>

Yet despite the introduction of these sharp measures and the threat of immediate correction, slaves continued to indulge in the infamous practice. On one occasion, the prince regent was almost forced to watch it. The police chief of the city, extremely annoyed by the episode, complained to the judge of the central Candelária parish in March 1814, that

after five o'clock in the afternoon, in fact the time when His Royal Majesty was there passing by, a *rancho* [group] of *capoeiras*, with knives and sticks and with the ribbons they sometimes use to come out, causing great mayhem and shouting [...]<sup>13</sup>

Taking on board the recommendations by his Majesty, he required thorough investigations to find out the identities of slaves responsible for such an act of disrespect. These and similar occurrences seemed to justify harsh measures against capoeiras and any similar threat against the public safety in a slave society.

In 1817 the Police Intendant Paulo Fernandes Viana announced that slaves found with knives were to suffer harsh penalties (300 lashes and three months of forced labour). Free individuals, even whites, though exempted from the whip, were threatened with the same three months of forced labour. No excuse was to be accepted from artisans or sailors who needed such instruments for their office, because they should leave them at their workplace. The Intendant then turned to the *capoeiras*, and, by the same token, gave one of the first definitions of their practice according to the authorities:

The same penalty will apply to all those who roam around the city, whistling and with sticks, committing disorder most of the times with no aim, and which are well known by the name of *capoeiras*, even if they do not provoke any injuries or death or any other crime [...]<sup>14</sup>

The Intendant's announcement reflected a problem that concerned legislators and police chiefs throughout the Empire: how to outlaw a practice that did not, in itself, represent a crime according to Western legal traditions? The first Brazilian Criminal Code (1831), inspired by liberal principles, does not even mention capoeira, and leaves it to the local legislation (*posturas municipais*) or the discretion of police chiefs to repress the practice. Yet it is mainly through these elite concerns and the repressive measures which police



chiefs implemented that we know of the existence of a slave practice called capoeira. Even though police records unfortunately do not tell us everything we would like to know about it, they still allow us to infer some important aspects of early nineteenth-century capoeira.

### Slave capoeira, 1808–1850

When I saw Vidigal  
My blood ran cold  
If I am not fast enough  
The *quati* rat will lick me  
(Popular verse about Major Vidigal,  
famous for his harsh treatment of *capoeiras*)<sup>15</sup>

Felipe, a slave from Angola, was taken into custody on 10 September 1810. He seems to have been the first individual arrested for ‘capoeira’ by the Royal Police Guard created two years earlier. Guard records list the individuals detained during subsequent years (1810–1821) and reveal some important details about the earliest form of capoeira we know of. Leila Algranti, the first historian to have made a systematic use of this source, found that capoeira accounted for 438 (9 per cent) of the 4,853 grounds given for arrests. It was second only to escapes of slaves.<sup>16</sup> Carlos Eugênio Soares looked more specifically at these first known victims of police repression in Rio. Out of the several hundred individuals arrested for capoeira during these years, as much as 91 per cent were slaves. 77 per cent of the detained were Africans and 10.6 creoles (with the rest of unspecified origins).<sup>17</sup>

The provenance of these first *capoeiras* caught in the net of state repression is also crucial for the discussion of its African origins. Eighty-four per cent came from West Central Africa, 9 per cent from East Africa (Mozambique) and only 7 per cent from West Africa (mainly Minas and Calabars).<sup>18</sup> The modest participation of West Africans could lead to the conclusion that their contribution to the development of the art was not important. One should however keep in mind that this percentage is consistent with their overall proportion among Africans in Rio, which never amounted to more than 7 per cent before 1850.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, their presence can also mean that there was some kind of West African input into capoeira from a very early stage.

The breakdown of the West Central African origins is even more revealing. Over 40 per cent of them came from northern Congo, including the Cabindas, Congos and Monjolos, representing a higher percentage than their share of the African population in the city. Slaves from northern Angola (mainly Angolas, Rebolos, Cassanges and Cabundas) accounted for almost a third of all slaves from the Kongo/Angola region, which corresponds roughly to their overall proportion among African slaves. The slaves from southern Angola (Benguelas and Ganguelas) are not quite as prominent among the arrested capoeiras in that early period as one would expect, since they already represented then the largest group of Africans in the city, and supposedly brought the capoeira ancestor *n’golo* along with them. They account for only 23 per cent of the arrested West Central Africans. Soares rightfully points out that one should look more at the estuary of the Congo river and northern Angola for possible African origins of capoeira, and that ‘diverse ancestral practices’ entered in its genesis.<sup>20</sup> Given the participation not only of Africans from different macro-regions but also of creoles in capoeira at that early phase, he concludes that ‘we cannot affirm that capoeira was an exclusively African activity. In reality, it seems that it was the fruit of a combination of dispersed African traditions and creole cultural “inventions”’.<sup>21</sup> As we have seen in [Chapter 2](#), the problem

that remains is that we do not know precisely how ‘dispersed’ or related these traditions were in Africa. It is therefore difficult to assess to what extent slaves borrowed or re-invented capoeira.

All sources indicate that participation in capoeira reflected to a large extent the composition of the slave and free African population. For instance, when the numbers of Benguelas further increased in the 1840s, they also became, in the 1850s, the most numerous group among arrested *capoeiras*. Capoeira possibly adopted more aspects of the cultural traditions of the ethnic groups abducted through the Benguela slave circuit (although we have seen that there was a significant overlap with the captives traded through Luanda under the denomination Angolas). However, all this remains highly speculative, since early nineteenth-century police records reveal so little about capoeira practice itself.

During the initial decades it is often referred to as a game. Police files explicitly state that individuals were arrested for ‘playing capoeira’. This is a crucial detail, insofar as some writers have defended a martial origin for capoeira, trying to suggest that its playful character constitutes a rather recent development.<sup>22</sup> If these sources confirm that capoeira was, from the onset, a game, they also make clear it was rough, often resulting in injuries for practitioners such as broken legs. Sometimes police officers also mention a brawl or ‘beating game’ (*jogo de pancadaria*), and it is not clear if they meant a particular technique or a different practice altogether. The head butt (*cabeçada*) is the only bodily technique these early police records refer to. Since we do not know how widespread the use of head butts was in pre-colonial Africa, it is, in my opinion, difficult to attribute that practice exclusively to one ethnic group, although the massive number of arrested *capoeiras* from Kongo/Angola indicates it must have been common in that macro-region. In this period *cabeçadas* were regarded—at least by the authorities—as the most significant evidence for playing capoeira. Sources also amalgamate the practice and the adepts under one single term, which has led some historians to believe that not every *capoeira* was necessarily a practitioner of the art, but could just have been a member of a gang of *capoeiras*.<sup>23</sup> With respect to the term *capoeira* ‘a spatial and temporal diversity exists, which allows the coexistence of many realities under one single concept.’<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, police sources never provide us with more detailed descriptions of the practice. Was capoeira played in a circle? Were instruments used? Since slaves arrested for capoeira often carried instruments with them, such as drums, violas, tambourines and bells, we can assume they did use them for the game.<sup>25</sup> In face of the extreme paucity of details in police records, the Bavarian painter Johann Moritz Rugendas (1802–1858) still provides one of the best early accounts:

The Negroes also have another war game, much more violent, the ‘jogar capoeira’: two champions charge against each other, and seek to hit with their head the chest of the opponent they want to throw to the ground. By jumps on the side, or equally skilful parries they escape from the attack; but by throwing themselves against each other, more or less like he-goats, they sometimes get badly hurt at the head: therefore one sees often the jesting being displaced by fury, to the point that blows and even knives stain the game with blood.<sup>26</sup>

Rugendas’ classic description and his well-known engraving of capoeira resulted from his first period residence in Brazil between March 1822 and May 1825 (see [Figure 3.1](#)). Although his engravings represent later idealizations of earlier drafts made on the spot,<sup>27</sup> we have no reason to doubt he saw a drum (and not a *berimbau*) during the capoeira games he attended. Rugendas’ engraving clearly indicates that opponents used rhythmic movements similar to modern *ginga* before or in between the blows. Yet he does not mention any foot kicks, cartwheels or other acrobatic movements. His description is strikingly similar to the nineteenth-century head butt game played by black males in distant Venezuela (see [Chapter 2](#)). Are we therefore to conclude that capoeira in at this moment was hardly more than a violent game of head butts?

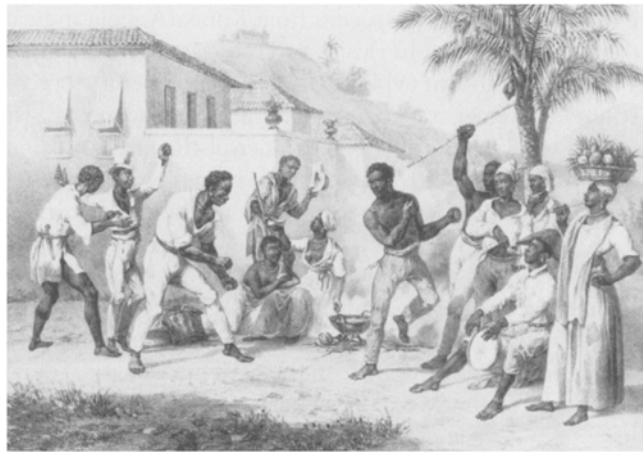


Figure 3.1 The earliest representation of capoeira. 'Jogar capoëra ou danse de la guerre', engraving by J.M. Rugendas, from *Voyage Pittoresque dans le Brésil* (Paris: Engelmann & Compagnie, 1835), PL 18 4th Div. By kind permission of The British Library.

Another rare eyewitness of the first half of the nineteenth century, known only as A.P.D.G., provides us with more information. This author describes how a slave used crouches and kicks to defend himself against two free men who abused him as he passed by: 'The negro gave him with the sole of his foot a kick in the stomach with such force and dexterity that he stretched him lifeless'.<sup>28</sup> The use of foot kicks and open hand techniques is also confirmed by a painting from Augustus Earle, showing 'Negro fighting in the Brazils', yet without any accompanying music. His work suggests that slave women enjoyed watching capoeira when practised as a friendly game (see Figure 3.2). Ferdinand Denis, a French traveller who resided in Brazil on different occasions during the years 1816–1831, clearly indicates that capoeira was a 'mock combat'.<sup>29</sup> At least some *capoeiras* carried and used weapons, which they tried to dispose of when arrested. In this early period, over a quarter of those detained for capoeira were carrying arms. According to Soares, Africans usually carried simple knives and only occasionally razors, whereas the early Brazilian *capoeiras* already preferred the *navalha* (razor or jackknife).<sup>30</sup> These testimonies imply that at this early stage, capoeira already encompassed different modalities, with or without music and weapons, from friendly games to full-fledged fights. It seems therefore inadequate to postulate that capoeira was a fight that evolved into a game or vice-versa.

Policemen arrested individuals because they were playing capoeira in the street (see Figure 3.3). This does not tell us anything about its practice in private. Earle's painting shows that slaves (the expression 'negros' always referred to captives) also played in backyards; and the officer climbing over the fence indicates not only the imminent repression but also the intrusion of the state into what slave owners considered their private sphere. In the public space, slaves and freedmen played capoeira or used it as an offensive weapon wherever they used to gather: in the streets, near taverns or on squares. Carioca Square appears as the first prominent meeting point for *capoeiras* in the city. The public fountain on the square attracted crowds of slaves queuing for water. It also offered many escape routes, including into the nearby hill of Santo Antônio (see Figure 3.4). Soares suggests that the struggle over access to fountains, which resulted in frequent fights among slaves, could have provoked capoeira gang formation and that control over squares was ferociously disputed by the emerging *maltsas*.<sup>31</sup>



Figure 3.2 Capoeira is depicted here as a game in the backyard without music. 'Negros fighting, Brazil'. Watercolour by Augustus Earle, 1820–1824. By kind permission of the Australian National Library.

The large Campo de Santana superseded the Carioca Square as favourite for capoeira activity during the 1830s. Other popular places for capoeira gatherings were Capim Square, the port area, the surroundings of the churches housing black brotherhoods, and the *zungus*. The *zungus* or *angu* houses stood for residences of slaves 'for hire' and of the free coloured population, where cheap food, and especially a corn-meal purée (*angu*) was sold. These houses constituted an alternative 'black space', where slaves and freedmen reunited not only to eat, but also to hold parties, worship their gods or play music. No wonder that *zungus* were under constant police surveillance and often shut down arbitrarily.<sup>32</sup> The São José parish, considered the



Figure 3.3 Artists recorded the harsh repression unleashed on capoeiras in Rio de Janeiro. 'Negroes which will be flogged'. Lithograph by Frederico Guilherme Briggs, 1840. By kind permission of Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

birthplace of capoeira by some of the first scholars writing on capoeira,<sup>33</sup> and the Valongo quay, infamous for its slave market, however seem to have been rather irrelevant for its practice during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup>

Some of the arrested capoeiras wore coloured ribbons, with a clear preference for yellow and red. The colours yellow and red have been related to religious traditions of the Kongo/Angola region. They—and slaves more generally—also liked to wear hats or caps, and in one instance, a feather.<sup>35</sup> The ribbons or some of the headgear may have served to mark ethnic belonging. To what extent these attributes already indicate affiliation to structured gangs is difficult to ascertain. Evidence regarding the social organization and the formation of capoeira gangs prior to the 1840s is unfortunately scarce. One indication of social organization among *capoeiras* at that stage is their use of whistling as reported by policemen. *Capoeiras* employed whistles to call each other in moments of need, eventually also to mark territories, just as they climbed on church towers to exhibit their acrobatic skills, ring the bells, attract the attention of the public and challenge authorities.<sup>36</sup>

Two events with the likely participation of *capoeiras* provide further indications about their early forms of organization and involvement in local politics. In June 1828, the Irish and German mercenaries contracted by the emperor rebelled over their conditions of treatment. They had been complaining for some time about the lack of payment, bad food, forceful extension of their time of service and excessive physical punishments. When a German soldier failed to salute a sergeant and was punished with 250 lashes, the German mercenaries assembled, marched to the imperial palace and asked to see the emperor. Pedro I only accepted to receive a commission of two soldiers and a full-fledged mutiny broke out on 9 June. German and Irish soldiers started to loot pubs and shops; many got drunk and eventually started to fight against each other. The slave owners—without any protection provided by the state—decided to arm their slaves to resist the drunken German and Irish soldiers. Observers described the ferocity of the slaves in dealing with the mutineers, avenging humiliations slaves had often been subjected to by foreign mercenaries. Although never mentioned explicitly in the sources, it is likely that many slaves used capoeira techniques in this confrontation.

After the crushing of the soldiers' mutiny, many slaves and free blacks tried to keep their weapons, forcing the Police Intendant to take further measures to confiscate arms in the city. Repression was therefore soon directed against both groups, the European mercenaries and the *capoeiras*. The nationalist historiography on capoeira uses these events as evidence that *capoeiras* were defending Brazilian national interests.<sup>37</sup> Although the role of the *capoeiras* might have been important for the smashing of the mutiny, it has to remain clear that their prime motivation was to grasp the opportunity to retaliate harassment by European soldiers rather than to raise the Brazilian flag.<sup>38</sup>

Anti-foreign, especially anti-Portuguese resentment was however important among the free lower classes and erupted in the street movements and rebellions of 1831, when the Portuguese-born emperor was forced to abdicate (7 April). *Capoeiras* certainly took advantage of these moments of breakdown of order. In July of that year a police patrol surprised over 200 'blacks and mulattoes' engaged in a battle among themselves in the Catete suburb. The *capoeiras* immediately reacted, stopping their fight and starting to throw stones at the patrol, which led to the wounding of its commander. When the patrol charged against the *capoeiras*, they divided into their respective factions and escaped into opposite directions.<sup>39</sup> This kind of episode suggests that some form of organization already existed among *capoeiras* at the time, but we have to be careful not to project our knowledge about gangs from later stages on this formative period.

Police records do not seem to allow further conclusions regarding capoeira gangs. Since the practice in itself was considered 'unacceptable', requiring immediate 'correction' and subsequent punishments, officers did not need to write detailed reports about arrested *capoeiras*. The police files indicate, furthermore, that

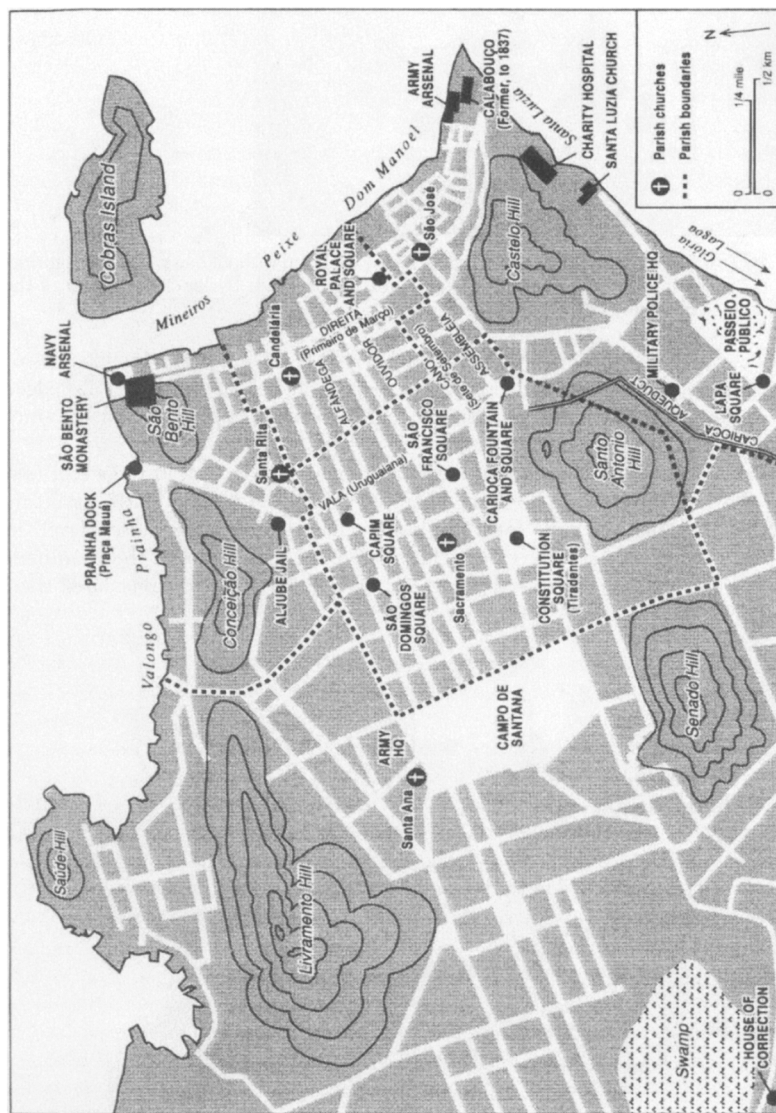


Figure 3.4 Central Section of Rio de Janeiro, c.1850. From T.H.Holloway, *Policing Rio de Janeiro: Repression and Resistance in a Nineteenth Century City*. Copyright (c) 1993 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Jr. University. With the permission of the Stanford University Press, [www.sup.org](http://www.sup.org).



any futile and arbitrary reason, such as a 'suspicious' or 'strange attitude', or lingering at a corner, was enough to arrest slaves and to a large extent even free coloured individuals. The data from several prisons suggest that capoeira remained an important reason for detention throughout the nineteenth century. From 288 slaves that entered the Calabouço jail during the year 1857–1858, 80 (31 per cent) were arrested for that reason, and only 28 (10.7 per cent) for running away.<sup>40</sup> Out of 4,303 arrests in Rio police jail in 1862, 404 detainees—nearly 10 per cent—had been arrested for capoeira.<sup>41</sup>

What treatment awaited detained *capoeiras*? As we have seen, immediate 'correction' was initially administered in the form of whipping. During the first years of repression, *capoeiras* were given between 100 and 300 lashes in jail and then released. In 1824, the government substituted the whipping of *capoeiras* by three months' work in the navy dockyards. This was not necessarily a lighter punishment given the conditions of labour and detention there.<sup>42</sup> This verdict was applied to slave and free alike. Two weeks later, however, another instruction recognized that free and freedmen needed to appear before the judge due to the dispositions of the 1824 Constitution that granted them citizen's rights. It does not seem, however, that the arrested free *capoeiras* ever enjoyed that right. By indulging in 'unacceptable' behaviour associated with slaves, it was as if they had also been stripped off their recently acquired Brazilian citizenship. A new instruction issued a couple of months later introduced a cumulative punishment for slave *capoeiras*: whipping and forced labour in the dockyards. At that stage some slave owners complained against what they saw as an unacceptable intrusion of the government in their private property affairs.

The liberal reforms of the 1820s and 1830s brought some modest improvements for captives. A decree by the Minister of Justice Diogo Antonio Feijó from November 1831 limited the number of lashes given to slaves to a total of 200, and no more than 50 lashes were to be given on a single day.<sup>43</sup> But this did not fundamentally alter the way *capoeiras*, slave and free alike, were dealt with. On the contrary, the 1820s also registered growing violence against slaves and blacks, and after the failed rebellion of Muslim slaves in Salvador, in 1835, the government adopted again tougher measures. In 1845 a new police chief established that slaves arrested for capoeira were to be administered 100 lashes after which they were to serve one month on public works. In the case of free *capoeiras*, authorities increasingly resorted to drafting them into military service or imprisoning them under other charges, more likely to result in jail sentences (vagrancy, disorder, or non accomplishment of earlier promises of 'good behaviour').<sup>44</sup>

The slave whippings usually took place in the Calabouço jail at the bottom of Castelo hill, assigned exclusively to slaves (see map). Owners sent their captives here for whipping, and were charged a fee. The Aljube was originally an ecclesiastical prison, which the Church had agreed to lease to the government for common convicts. Many prisoners were however locked up without due process or sentence for years. Sanitary conditions in both prisons were beyond description, and many slaves or free people did not leave them alive. Only the House of Correction, built in the 1830s, offered slightly better conditions. The navy arsenal was the main destination for arrested slave *capoeiras*, once they had been administered their immediate 'correction'. The jail and working places of the navy arsenal were spread over various locations: a prison-ship, the Presiganga, where prisoners worked during the day and were locked up during the night; the arsenal prison on the Cobras Island, with free and slave inmates, and the Dique, or dockyards, on the same island, for the construction of which slaves and other inmates were employed during the years 1824–1861.<sup>45</sup> Especially during their terms in the navy arsenal, slaves and free *capoeiras* were forced to socialize with other prisoners. The jail population of these years consisted not only of common criminals charged with theft, assault or murder, but equally of many individuals arrested for violating curfews or public order. Sailors and political prisoners (the most prominent of the latter being Cipriano Barata, the revolutionary leader from Bahia), constituted two sizeable groups through which arrested *capoeiras* were exposed to new ideas and new forms of organization. Soares noticed a 'high degree of social exchange' between slaves and



prisoners, soldiers and sailors. Often the complicity of sentinels helped prisoners in their attempts to escape. Soares' work also highlights the Navy arsenal as the site where the ideas of the Atlantic Revolution spread to new social groups, both slave and free. Since plantation slaves also were imprisoned here, the arsenal was furthermore a location through which capoeira practice possibly spread to the interior.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast to the common belief that capoeira 'comes from the plantations', there is not much evidence for its practice on rural estates. Statistics suggest that few slaves from that background were ever arrested for this reason. There were 'hundreds of maroons, runaways, rebels' among the slaves transferred to Rio's jails from the interior, but only one of them had been arrested for capoeira.<sup>47</sup> Yet this does not necessarily mean that capoeira was completely unheard of in plantation areas. The French journalist Charles Ribeyrolles provided, under the heading 'Games and Dances of the Negroes', one rare account of capoeira practice on a *fazenda* of the Rio de Janeiro province, in 1859:

Saturday evening, after the last working task of the week, and on holidays that give idleness and rest, the blacks have an hour or two of the evening for dancing. They assemble in their *terreiro*, calling, gathering and inciting each other, and the celebration starts. Here it is the capoeira, a kind of Pyrrhic dance, with daring combat evolutions, regulated by the Congo drum; there it is the *batuque*, with its cold or indecent postures which the *urucungo*, viola with thin cords, accelerates or contains; further away it is a frenzied dance where the gaze, the breasts and the hips provoke. It is a kind of inebriated convulsion one calls the *lundu*.<sup>48</sup>

This is a rather late account and thus an original dissemination from Rio cannot be excluded. Pol Briand, in his critical appraisal, even casts doubts over whether Ribeyrolles is describing what he saw himself or rather reproduces information from other books to write his own account of a 'generic' plantation. The problem is not, as many capoeira practioners believe, that records do not exist or have been burned. In fact, a number of historians have written monographs about the coffee plantations of the Paraíba valley based on substantial primary sources, and none of them seems to have come across capoeira as a significant manifestation. However, various towns in São Paulo apparently outlawed capoeira 'or any other kind of fight' during the 1830s and 1850s. A municipal law from Cabreúva, for instance, banned the 'practice or training of the game named capoeira' from 'streets, squares, public houses or any other public space'. Slaves were to suffer a penalty of 20 lashes instead of paying the fine.<sup>49</sup> It has to be said that these laws were often simply copied from a central model, usually that of the capital city. Yet despite these reservations, we should not entirely discard the idea that capoeira existed in the interior of the provinces of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo during the nineteenth century. Given that many combat games in the Caribbean took place on plantations, it seems logical that similar practices also happened on Brazilian estates. Evidence for the twentieth-century interior of Bahia suggests that these rural forms were however much less complex in terms of movements and rituals than their urban counterparts.<sup>50</sup>

Ribeyrolles highlighted the coexistence of three manifestations slaves liked to indulge in their free time—capoeira, *batuque*, and *lundu*. Specific instruments accompanied each of them. Yet, just as in Rugendas' account, he assigns a Congo drum to capoeira practice, and the music bow (*berimbau* or *uricongo*) rather to the *batuque* dance. Other sources described a similar coexistence of the 'combat dance', capoeira, and the 'love dance', *batuque*, on the main squares of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>51</sup> Thus capoeira in Rio de Janeiro, when practised as a friendly modality, could clearly be associated with other slave diversions. In that form it enjoyed a more general acceptance among the lower classes in general and Africans and Afro-Brazilian in particular.

While there seemed to exist a Central African-derived basic structure of these practices in both rural and urban settings, in Rio de Janeiro *batuque* and to some extent capoeira also became part of broader, and more syncretic practices. *Capoeiras* took advantage of public events for their own purposes. They displayed their power and exhibited their skills in front of processions and even military parades. Whilst the *capoeiras*' attendance at the festival of the Holy Spirit could reflect true devotion, their presence at other venues was often a mere pretext for sowing disorder or settling pending disputes.<sup>52</sup> The folklorist Mello Moraes described the intervention of capoeiras in public events around the mid-century:

Sometimes, interrupting the course of a procession, or the pace of a parade, one could hear, jointly with screams of the ladies fleeing in terror, of *negras* carrying the young master in their arms, of fathers seeking refuge for their wife and children, the horrendous 'Shut down! Shut down' [Shouted by the *capoeiras* to close down the event]. The *caxinguelés* [adolescent capoeira apprentices] flew at the front, *capoeiragem* exploded without restraints, and the mayhem resulted in broken heads, shattered light posts, stabbings and deaths...<sup>53</sup>

These descriptions make clear that the *capoeiras* sought to humiliate public authorities. Yet does it also mean, as Maya Chvaicer has recently asserted, that the *capoeiras* always 'pleased the crowds' and that 'the masses admired and respected the performers'?<sup>54</sup> Whilst friendly games could be part of slave diversions, the disorder promoted by gangs was less likely to enjoy that kind of unrestricted admiration. Members of capoeira gangs were, no doubt, admired by many young black or coloured males—free or slave alike—who eventually joined their ranks. Yet no single source suggests that kind of overall admiration of wider audiences for the public appearances of *capoeiras*.<sup>55</sup> As the well-known writer Machado de Assis claimed, the *capoeiras* were probably fascinated by the 'eroticism of publicity' and genuinely enjoyed displaying their acrobatic skills rather than worrying about their popularity among the wider population.<sup>56</sup>

The social structure of Cariocan society was far too complex and capoeira practice far too ambivalent to appeal so broadly to undifferentiated urban 'masses'. Carlos Eugênio Soares has shown that most episodes in the early police records (1810–1821) are not about conflicts between *capoeiras* and police, but between slaves themselves: 'capoeira, more than an element of slave resistance, was an important piece in the power game among the slaves, in which freedmen and free had a marginal participation'.<sup>57</sup> And as more 'coloured' free males started to learn capoeira, the insertion of the practice into Cariocan society turned out to be increasingly multifaceted and ambiguous. If one reads capoeira only as a weapon against elite oppression one cannot understand why, for example, slave revolts failed to materialize in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro. As Luiz Sérgio Dias stated, capoeira in that period cannot be treated simply as 'the clear expression of a class conflict or an undisputed manifestation of black consciousness'.<sup>58</sup> And as the city developed further, capoeira and its social context became even more complex.

### The broadening of the social base, 1850–1890

Everybody can learn it [capoeira]  
The Army general and also the Doctor  
(Capoeira 'prayer' as sung by M.Pastinha, Bahia)

The demographic changes which affected the Cariocan population over these years—creolization, decrease of the proportion of slaves, and growing importance of European, mainly Portuguese immigration—also

had an impact on the capoeira universe. As a result, the social and ethnic background of *capoeiras* in Rio underwent substantial change during the second half of the nineteenth century. Since slaves and blacks were always more exposed to police attention, one needs to take into account that the identity of the arrested *capoeiras* might not be entirely representative. The change of pattern is nevertheless clear. The proportion of creole slaves rose continuously among those arrested. In the 1850s, about one third of detained slave *capoeiras* were already born in Brazil.<sup>59</sup> The abolition of the transatlantic slave trade by the Brazilian government in 1850 meant that young Africans were no longer disembarked on the shores of the city, and as a consequence, not only the proportion of Africans within the *capoeiras* dropped further, but their overall age also tended to increase.

The number of free practitioners of the art also increased substantially. In 1881, 60 per cent of the arrested *capoeiras* were free, against 40 per cent slaves.<sup>60</sup> Slaves still were over represented among the arrested, since their overall proportion of the population by then was only 17 per cent. The ratio of capoeira bondsmen, however, dropped even further thereafter, reflecting the fact that slavery, as an institution, was on the verge of collapse. Urban slave labour had been declining for decades. One reason for this development was that the coffee plantations—the most dynamic sector of the Brazilian economy in the second half of the nineteenth century—needed growing numbers of labourers and offered good money for young slaves. This resulted in an internal, inter-provincial slave trade substituting the transatlantic one after 1850. Substantial numbers of slaves of productive age from the Northeast and the cities were purchased by coffee planters from the interior of Rio and São Paulo provinces. Free workers in all professions increasingly replaced urban slaves. The majority of the free *capoeiras* that appear in the police files worked in trades or in the streets as pedlars or porters. Mello Moraes, for instance, illustrated his work with the photo of a black ‘*capoeira* taylor’.<sup>61</sup>

Increasingly the Portuguese immigrant figured prominently among the free workers in Rio. Not that there was an absolute lack of Brazilian free labour. Most of the native work force was however of African or at least mixed ancestry. ‘Scientific’ theories, which became dominant in Europe at the time, proclaimed the inferiority of non-white ‘races’. Brazilian elites eagerly adopted these notions, which reinforced earlier racial stereotypes and prejudices. Accordingly, government and elites were all too happy to accept a massive influx of white European immigrants, which promised to ‘whiten’ the country. Migrants came usually from impoverished rural and urban backgrounds, and hoped to improve their lives in Brazil. Most immigrants to Rio came from the overpopulated Atlantic islands (Azores and Madeira), northern Portugal, and some Spanish provinces, such as Galicia. In 1872, almost 56,000 Portuguese nationals resided in Rio de Janeiro, representing over a fifth of the city’s population; that proportion remained unchanged until the 1890s.<sup>62</sup>

Immigrants were usually young single males, who had to compete with coloured poor Brazilian men for jobs, housing and even women. No wonder strong animosity against the ‘Galicians’ (*galego*) often developed among the native Cariocan population, resulting in a strong stereotype of the clog-wearing, mean and stupid immigrant, who only socialized with his fellow compatriots.<sup>63</sup> The reality was however more complex. The Portuguese not only substituted slaves in many skilled jobs, toiling side by side with coloured or black Brazilians, and enduring similar exploitation (to the point they were called ‘white slaves’). They also lived in the same squalid accommodation, the *cortiços*. Since there was no residential segregation, inevitably many of them ended up assimilating the surrounding popular, and more specifically Afro-Brazilian, culture.

This is why in the 1860s a growing number of Portuguese were detained for *capoeiragem*,<sup>64</sup> reflecting their massive presence in the city, and also their low social status. Among the free *capoeiras*, black and increasingly coloured men (classified as *pardos*) still constituted the majority, but whites—up to the 1850s rather an exception—came to represent a significant group. In 1885, whites represented at least 22 per cent

of the arrested capoeiras, increasing to 33 per cent in 1890, whereas blacks counted for 36 and 30 per cent respectively in these years, the rest being considered *pardos* or not being qualified in terms of colour. Almost all of those classified as whites seem to have been of Portuguese or more generally European origins: 'Europeans' (identified by their place of birth) made up as much as 22 per cent of the arrested capoeiras in 1885, and 17 per cent in 1890.<sup>65</sup>

During the second half of the nineteenth century, capoeira became increasingly popular among members of the different armed corporations. The National Guard, with a significant number of coloured free men in its ranks, was the first institution to be infiltrated by *capoeiras*, at least from the 1850s onwards. Police chiefs became increasingly worried about the growing numbers of *capoeiras* causing problems, who were in fact members of the National Guard. In subsequent years, the army and even the police showed clear signs of being infiltrated. This 'strange symbiosis' between the military and the *capoeiras* challenges any simple dichotomy between forces of order and those of slave or black resistance.<sup>66</sup> It also explains why the waves of repression against *capoeiras* launched for instance in 1843 or 1878 were ultimately unsuccessful in eradicating the practice. The multiple and discrete webs of patronage and protection prevented any repression from being too systematic.

Capoeira even made some inroads into the upper ranks of Cariocan society. Isolated elite practitioners of capoeira seem to have always existed. A militia lieutenant known as Amotinado, for instance, is reported to have used head butts and kicks to protect his patron, the Viceroy Marquis de Lavradio, in his erotic adventures in colonial Rio de Janeiro.<sup>67</sup> Knowledge of capoeira is also attributed to the infamous major of the militia, Vidigal, who became the right arm of the first Police Intendant, in 1808, and as such was responsible for the ruthless repression of capoeira and *batuques*.<sup>68</sup> Yet during the last decades of the Empire, a more significant number of elite or middle-class males, especially from the armed forces or bohemian circles, learned capoeira fighting techniques. Some, such as future president of the Republic Floriano Peixoto and his police chief in Rio, Sampaio Ferraz, became instrumental in the repression of the practice in which they had themselves indulged. Yet others, especially the journalist and caricaturist Raul Pederneiras and the Portuguese writer Plácido de Abreu Moraes, left us the very few detailed descriptions of the art and its rituals.<sup>69</sup> The most prominent of all was José Elísio dos Reis, the son of the Count of Matosinhos, owner of the influential republican newspaper *O País*. Nicknamed Juca Reis, he made himself known for brutalizing a famous French actress on the stairs of a theatre, in 1877. He was involved in a number of other street brawls in subsequent years and deported by the new republican government in 1890.<sup>70</sup>

To what extent these social changes impacted on capoeira practice is not easy to assess. The Portuguese brought along their own traditions of lower-class fighting, resistance and urban bohemia. The stick game (*jogo do pau*) was the traditional art of self-defence practised by peasants and shepherds in the northern part of the country, especially in the Minho province, but also in Spanish Galicia and the Azores—precisely the areas most immigrants came from. In these regions, young males always carried a stick of approximately 1.60m length with them. Fighting techniques were transmitted from generation to generation, and by the end of the nineteenth century at least, they were also taught in backyards (*patios*). When rivalries among young men or between entire villages erupted during local markets, festivals of patron saints or pilgrimages, the stick was the main weapon they relied on to fight.<sup>71</sup> Aluísio de Azevedo gave an insightful account of how Portuguese migrants used sticks to fight Brazilians in his acclaimed novel *O Cortiço* (1890). In one of the key scenes, Jerônimo (the Portuguese migrant) confronts Firmo (the mulatto *capoeira*) as both aim to possess Rita, the gorgeous Bahian woman.<sup>72</sup>

Cascudo suggested that the massive use of sticks and other offensive weapons in Cariocan capoeira after 1850 is due to Portuguese influence.<sup>73</sup> However, as we have seen in [Chapter 2](#), stick fighting was prominent in many Southern African societies, and we can take it for granted that also some of the slaves deported to



Figure 3.5 Capoeira *ginga* with sticks ‘A Peneiração’, *Revista Kosmos*, No. 3 (March 1906). Courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

Rio possessed these skills. Furthermore, the Portuguese stick is large, usually reaching from the ground to the armpit, whereas the sticks used by *capoeiras* were usually much smaller. According to Mello Moraes they were attached to their wrist by a linen cord and did ‘never exceed fifty centimetres’ (see Figure 3.5).<sup>74</sup> According to other sources, however, capoeiras also used middle-sized clubs of the size of a walking stick, exactly the format of sticks used for defensive purposes by nineteenth-century European gentlemen (see Figure 3.6). The size of the weapon obviously determines the techniques that can be used, but many of them can be applied with sticks of different sizes. Since we have no descriptions of the stick techniques employed in Rio it is difficult to reach a conclusion regarding their ethnic origins. I believe that the widespread practice of stick fighting in many African societies and in Portugal reinforced each other and that techniques from different styles fused. The outcome is nevertheless clear: an urban, creole capoeira in multi-ethnic Rio de Janeiro.



Figure 3.6 A caricature ridiculing the recruitment of capoeiras into the police force promoted by the Conservative Party. Note the use of medium-sized sticks as integral part of capoeira outfits. ‘Types of murderers and petty thieves or the finest of our actual police, chosen among the best of the capangada’. *Revista Ilustrada*, No. 422 (1885). Courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.



Figure 3.7 Open-handed blow and a razor attack ‘A Lamparina’ (left); kick to the chest (corresponds to *benção* in twentieth-century practice) ‘Meter o Andante’ (centre); and head butt ‘A Cocada’ (right). Drawings by Calixto Cordeiro. *Revista Kosmos*, No. 3 (March 1906). Courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

A Portuguese influence is easier to establish for the razor. The *navalha*, which translates both as razor or jackknife, figures prominently in the Lisbon underworld. Its main user was the *fadista*, a term denominating not only a singer of melancholic *fados*, but also a wider social type who belonged, with prostitutes, pimps, vagrants and sailors, to the milieu of Lisbon marginality. *Fadista* meant a tough guy who liked fights and disorder. Marcos Bretas drew attention to the cultural proximity between the *fadista* and the *capoeira*, and Carlos Eugênio Soares has shown how technical terms such as *sardinha*, *rasteira* and even *ginga* were used on both sides of the Atlantic, in the *fadista* slang of Lisbon and the *capoeira* jargon from Rio.<sup>75</sup> Since the significant presence of the Portuguese in Cariocan capoeira coincided with the adoption of the razor as the preferred weapon, one can safely assume that their specific skills in its handling also spread among practitioners. These changes provide further evidence that transformations of the social context inevitably impacted on the formal aspects of capoeira practice. We can therefore assume that this has always been the case, even though the available sources do not allow us to track these changes accurately for earlier periods.

By the late nineteenth century capoeira in Rio de Janeiro combined five complementary fighting techniques: head butts, foot kicks, open hand blows, knife and stick techniques (see Figure 3.7). No source suggests that this kind of combination ever existed in Africa. The fusion of these disparate techniques shows how problematic the thesis of a Bantu ‘enduring central paradigm’ is in the case of Cariocan capoeira.<sup>76</sup> Capoeira was not an isolated cultural practice, but an urban phenomenon reflecting and influencing the historical process that led to the formation of Cariocan, and by extension, Brazilian society. To what extent capoeira creolized is further documented by the substantial changes that affected its cultural and political meaning in the second half of the nineteenth century.

### Nagoas and Guaiamus: the capoeira gangs

During the second half of the nineteenth century, a specific form of association, the *malta*, consolidated among the *capoeiras* in Rio de Janeiro. Although one suspects that they might have formed at an much earlier stage, solid evidence for the existence of structured gangs—as opposed to loose groups which assembled rather spontaneously—only exists for the 1840s onwards. Soares categorically affirms that gangs (*malta*s) constituted the basic structure of capoeira activity since its beginnings. The data to support his claim is that half of the arrests for capoeira in the period 1808–1850 were made in groups. However, most of these ‘groups’ were composed of only two or three individuals! Soares’ conclusion that there were seven ‘principal gangs’ in the city in 1817 rests only on the fact that one officer required the arrest of



‘all the negros and mulattos’ that ‘entertain themselves in *capoeiragem* games’ in seven different locations in the city.<sup>77</sup>

The most interesting information on gang rituals provided by insiders dates only from the final years of the Empire. Capoeira gangs constituted a kind of secret society of predominantly young, black or coloured lower-class males in a hostile environment dominated by white and mestizo slave owners. The clandestine character of the *maltas* implies that many aspects of their organization will probably never be known and it is therefore extremely difficult to assess on what principles of solidarities they were built upon. According to most sources the gangs were organized on the basis of territoriality.<sup>78</sup>

The control over a specific territory, usually around a church square and its neighbourhood, became the key feature of gang identity, and maybe for that reason capoeira gangs also described themselves as a ‘house’ or a ‘province’. Their names often derived from particular churches or parishes: the *capoeiras* from São Francisco de Paula called themselves Franciscanos, those from Santa Luzia Luzianos, and the gang located around the Jesuit church in the Castelo area Santo Inácio.<sup>79</sup> The defence of their territory against intruders from rival *maltas* was the origin of many confrontations that ended with heavy casualties—wounded and dead—on both sides. The very square around which the *malta* had coalesced often provided the battleground.

During the 1860s the organization of the capoeira gangs suffered severe disruption due to the heavy draft for war. As the Brazilian Empire engaged in its first international conflict since the 1820s, it quickly became evident that its army and navy were not well prepared for the war. In order to avoid the risk of military rebellions, which had seriously jeopardized political stability during the independence period, the standing army had been significantly reduced during the 1830s. Now the imperial government needed to expand its armed forces rapidly in order to face the well-trained and equipped army of the Paraguayan *caudillo* López. The Brazilian government relied on three complementary devices to boost its standing armed forces. Taking advantage of the patriotic feelings and manifestations unequalled since the period of independence, battalions of ‘Voluntaries of the Fatherland’ were constituted in every province. 54,000 volunteers from all over the Empire thus fought in Paraguay. The National Guard, the citizens’ militia created in the 1830s to maintain law and order in every province, were also asked to serve in the campaign, and almost 60,000 of them were sent to the battlefields. The government furthermore resorted to compulsory recruitment and also enlisted slaves, who were promised freedom in exchange for their service to the fatherland. At least a further 8,500 freedmen and coerced recruits thus complemented the ranks of the Brazilian armed forces in Paraguay.<sup>80</sup>

The war against Paraguay (1865–1870) represents a major, and underestimated, watershed in Brazilian cultural history. By naming countless squares and streets after battle sites of the war, the authorities wanted to ensure that the glorious achievements of the Brazilian armed forces were forever remembered. Since then, names such as Paissandu, Humaitá, Tuiuti, Riachuelo, Curuzu, and Aquidabã figure prominently in the Brazilian urban landscape. The war had also number of important social consequences. Brazilians from very different backgrounds and regions intermingled in the barracks and on the battlefields. Veterans expected, and to a large extent enjoyed, esteem and admiration from the wider population, even if they were former slaves. In Rio de Janeiro alone, 2,900 slaves were freed because of their participation in the war, the great majority of them being granted their freedom during the years 1867–1868.<sup>81</sup> Among them were, undoubtedly, numerous *capoeiras*. This was also the case for many free males drafted into the army.

The police chief and recruiting agents had made clear they wanted to use recruitment to clean the city of its *capoeiras*, and it appears that in this they were relatively successful—at least for the time of the conflict. The War therefore seems to have seriously disrupted the capoeira gang structure. T.J.Desch-Obi claims that it was for this reason foreign immigrants were able to make forays into the world of the *maltas*, and that the





Figure 3.8 A Nagoa (with lowered brim) and a Guayamú (with lifted brim) in typical outfits. *Revista Kosmos*, No. 3 (March 1906). Courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

return of ‘many African and African-Brazilian *capoeiras*’ ‘marked the end of the anomalistic [sic] high representation of Portuguese in the *malta*s.’<sup>82</sup> While I agree on the disruptive impact of the war on gang structure (even though we have not as yet much evidence for it), I cannot see any proof for this author’s claim that the Portuguese presence was reduced in the period after the war. Furthermore, most freed soldiers were creoles, not Africans. Since the armed forces clearly preferred to recruit Brazilians, Africans represented only 4 per cent of freed slave soldiers in Rio.<sup>83</sup>

What is clear, however, is that by the 1870s the local gangs had coalesced into two more encompassing rival groups or ‘nations’, called the Nagoas and the Guaiamus.<sup>84</sup> C.E. Soares, author of the most meticulous study on the topic, compared patterns of residence with the affiliation of each gang to one of these wider groups. His conclusion regarding the geography of the *malta*s is that the Guaiamus occupied the old city centre, mainly the Sacramento and the Santa Rita parishes, the latter including the port area, characterized by overcrowded tenements (*cortiços*). The Nagoas, on the contrary, were strongest in the areas of more recent urban occupation, forming a circle around the old city centre, and they dominated areas such as Glória, Lapa and the Santa Luzia beach.<sup>85</sup> The large Campo de Santana square constituted a territory disputed by both groups.

Soares compared the geography of *malta* affiliation with the patterns of residence of African and creole slaves. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, Africans, especially the newly arrived, concentrated in the rural parishes around the centre. He suggested therefore that the Nagoas were ‘identified with a slave and African tradition of capoeira’, whilst the Guaiamus ‘should be linked to a native and mestizo root’.<sup>86</sup> He also claimed that the representation of a ‘typical’ Nagoa and Guaiamu (published in a newspaper in 1906, see Figure 3.8) showed that the latter was lighter skinned than the former. However, as Soares recognizes himself, by mid-century the concentration of Africans was greatest in the central parishes of Santa Rita and Sacramento—the actual strongholds of the Guaiamus. Furthermore, these are only broad trends, since Africans and creoles were largely present in all parishes. Since patterns of residence do not strongly correlate with gang affiliation, it seems rather problematic to explain the identity of the Nagoas and

Guaïamus by the binary opposition of Africans versus creoles. In addition, the idea of an encompassing African—as opposed to Brazilian—identity does not seem very likely in the face of what we know about slaves and freed people living in Brazilian cities. As discussed in [Chapter 2](#), slaves rather associated with neo-colonial nations such as Nagô, Jeje or Angola, than assuming a ‘Pan-African’ identity.<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, the composition of the gangs did not follow strict ethnic divisions. Most of them congregated Africans and creoles, blacks, mestizos and whites, Brazilians and Europeans, although with significant variations. In 1888, the police arrested 33 members of the gang Cadeira da Senhora (‘the Lady’s Chair’), based in Campo de Santana. Blacks constituted the majority with 54.5 per cent, followed by mestizos (*pardos*, 18 per cent) and whites (12 per cent). The relatively low percentage of whites—if compared to overall figures of arrested *capoeiras* in these years—and the absence of any Portuguese can be explained by the Nagoa affiliation of this gang. But as Soares rightly points out, if creoles were leaders of mainly African *malta*s and elderly Africans taught capoeira to younger, lower-class whites, no simple dichotomy can explain the boundaries between Nagoas and Guaïamus.<sup>88</sup> Even residential patterns were not that clear: gangs recruited as much as half of their members outside the area they considered their territory.

Soares suggests religion as a further criterion for explaining the difference between Nagoa and Guaïamu. According to him, the Guaïamus, ‘symbols of a mestizo culture, immersed in the signs of Christian domination’, frequently adopted names that referred to Catholic traditions. The *malta* names Três Cachos (‘Three Bunches’) and Flor da Uva (‘Flower of the Grape’) invoked the grapes associated with Saint Rita; Ossos (‘Bones’) the bones representing martyrdom on the facade of the Bom Jesus do Calvário church, and Lança (‘Lance’) almost certainly was an allusion to the weapon used by St George to slay the dragon. True as this may be, it does not seem on the other side that the Nagoas were exempt from adopting Catholic symbols. As Thomas Holloway has already argued, the Nagoa gang name the Lady’s Chair almost certainly referred to St Anne, who is usually depicted seated.<sup>89</sup>

If the impact of Catholic symbolism on gang culture is therefore undeniable, we still do not know enough about the reasons why the encompassing Nagoa and Guaïamus affiliations and identities developed. I would suggest that the history of confrontations between *malta*s might as well account for gang identity, but more research needs to be done on this topic. We do know more on precise gang rituals and actions due to the late testimonies of Plácido Abreu (1886) and Mello Moraes Filho (1888). A *malta* counted anything between half a dozen and a hundred individuals. According to Abreu, himself a practitioner, ‘the parties [gangs] are organized with a chief, adjutant, sergeants and rank and file soldiers’, suggesting that military principles also had some influence in gang culture.<sup>90</sup> This should come as no surprise since many *capoeiras* served as policemen, National Guards, or soldiers.

Initiation into capoeira started at a very early age. Boys as young as 10 or 12 started to train with more experienced *capoeiras*. Among the 33 arrested *capoeiras* of the Cadeira da Senhora *malta* referred to above, 18 per cent were under 15, and almost 60 per cent only between 15 and 20 years old. At the initial stage boys were referred to as *caxinguelés*, *sarandeje* or *carrapetas*. Their function was to run ahead of the gang spreading the message of its arrival, provoking its opponents, transmitting messages and carrying out other services for adult gang members.<sup>91</sup> *Capoeiras* trained, according to circumstances, both in the open (streets and squares) and in more discreet locations, such as backyards or the hills surrounding the city. The Guaïamu, for instance, used to exercise their neophytes by a mango tree on the Livramento hill, whereas the Nagoas used the Russel beach or the Pinto hill. ‘Training took place regularly on Sunday mornings and included head [butt] and feet [kick] exercises, razor and knife blows.’<sup>92</sup>

Confrontations between gangs conformed to rituals of challenge that developed among urban, lower-class males:

Therefore, when enemy capoeiras meet in a fortress (tavern) the Guaiamú asks for wine and rum, spills the latter on the ground and steps on it in swaying motion ('saracoteia em cima') and finally drops the wine over the rum. This is enough to start the fight, because a *capoeira* will not allow his colour to be stepped on and even less it being covered by the colour of his opponents. For that reason many honest workers that used coloured ribbons have been cut with razors.<sup>93</sup>

Although African traditions contributed significantly to the development of these rituals of conflict, it would still be inadequate to view them at this stage as primarily 'African-derived'. The colours used by the two main capoeira 'nations' are a case in point. Whilst the use of yellow and red in the early slave capoeira can, as we have seen, be linked to West Central African traditions, the red and the white of Nagoas and Guaiamus coincide with the colours of the Holy Spirit. This was the most popular Catholic cult in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, and its celebration precisely constituted a prime locus for intense cultural circulation between different ethnic and social groups and the emergence of creolized expressions of popular culture.<sup>94</sup>

Before and even during street fights, gangs challenged each other with verses to increase tension and provoke their adversaries. According to Abreu, the Guaiamus sang:

Little Theresa de Jesus  
Open the door and turn off the light,  
I want to see Nagoa dying  
At the door of [the church of] Good Jesus

To this the Nagoas answered:

The castle holds aloft the banner,  
Saint Francis rang the bell,  
Guaiamu are complaining  
[Because] Manoel Black has arrived

All sources agree that street fights between *malts* were extremely violent. Gang members made use of all weapons at their disposal (clubs and knives) and confrontations often ended with numerous casualties. The rituals of gang culture framed even the slaughter of adversaries:

There was a festival at the Saint Rita church. The *nagoas* turned up around one o'clock in the afternoon in that *Guaiamu* spot; the latter received them with drawn knives and most distinguishable among them was Jorge, the Navy chief, who grabbed a *Nagoa* by his hair and thrust a knife three times in his heart, letting him fall, bloodstained, face downwards on the pavement.

It is believed among these villains, that when a victim falls in this position, his murderer is almost certain to be caught by the Justice. Jorge, however, having been notified of this occurrence by a companion, went back, grabbed again the cadaver, and for a last time buried the murderous blade in the body of his victim, disappearing subsequently.<sup>95</sup>

Unfortunately, not many biographical details are known about the famous *capoeiras* of that period, unless they belonged to the elites. The case of Manduca da Praia illustrates how *capoeiras* inserted themselves into local economy and politics. The second part of his nickname ('from the beach') derived from his



Figure 3.9 The sweeping kick, ‘Rasteira’, is still practised in contemporary capoeira. *Revista Kosmos*, No. 3 (March 1906). Courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

profession. Manduca owned a fish stand on the market square near the Praia do Peixe (‘Fish Beach’), which granted him a comfortable middle-class lifestyle. ‘Dexterous as a shadow’, he was initiated into capoeira in the 1850s. Mello Moraes, who personally knew him, described Manduca in his later years as ‘a light-skinned mulatto, big,...only carrying as a weapon a fine walking stick of wood from India’.<sup>96</sup>

According to some sources he was the chief of the Santa Luzia *malta*.<sup>97</sup> In that capacity he confronted cadets from the Military Academy in 1861, among whom were the future president of the republic, Floriano Peixoto, and other upcoming politicians such as Rio Branco (Foreign Secretary, 1900–1910). Following one account that greatly emphasizes the heroism of the later president, Floriano came to help some of his fellow cadets who had been prevented from crossing the Carioca square by the Santa Luzia gang. In the ensuing duel with Manduca, Floriano is said to have defeated the *malta* leader by applying him a sweeping kick or *rasteira* (see Figure 3.9). Subsequently the group of cadets beat up the *malta*, making use of capoeira fighting techniques themselves.<sup>98</sup> Mello Moraes relates other brawls in which Manduca’s fighting skills appear in a more favourable light. He is said to have beaten up a whole group of Portuguese pilgrims, armed with sticks, at the annual festivities for Our Lady da Penha. In another famous duel, he confronted the Portuguese MP Sant’Ana e Vasconcelos, a ‘distinguished gentleman’ and reputed stick fighter, who had challenged him. Manduca swiftly sent Sant’Ana in the air with one of his kicks; they ended up drinking champagne and becoming friends.<sup>99</sup>

Manduca was an ‘active’ citizen in the São José parish, qualified for the second turn of elections to the parliament.<sup>100</sup> He also worked for many years as a canvasser (*cabo eleitoral*) for the Conservatives and participated in the manipulation of elections in favour of that party. What in fact most clearly distinguished Nagoas and Guaiaumus was their connection with one of the two main political parties of the Empire, the Conservatives and the Liberals. The Nagoas had strong personal ties with key Conservative politicians, whilst the Guaiaumus tended to ally with the Liberals. As the case of Manduca da Praia shows, *capoeiras* acted both as canvassers and *capangas*. Whilst the *capanga* played the tough guy during elections, intimidating voters to support his party or manipulating the ballot boxes, the *cabo eleitoral* provided a more permanent link between the elected representatives and their voters. Although in Rio only 16,000 citizens

were allowed to participate in primary elections before the 1881 electoral reform, this still meant that a significant section of the male urban professionals had to be convinced to vote for the 'right' candidate.

The case of the *malta* Flor da Gente can illustrate how the politicians used *capoeiras* to get elected through gang violence. This *malta* was based in the Glória parish, a residential neighbourhood south of the centre, home to many famous politicians of the time. Luís Joaquim Duque-Estrada Teixeira was a member of the Conservative party, for which he was re-elected several times as a deputy. He also served as a justice of the peace, which meant he was responsible for law and order in his district. Apparently he had become acquainted with capoeira when a student at São Paulo's law faculty. Duque-Estrada became the patron of the Glória capoeira gang and openly used its members in the 1872 elections. On the run-up to the elections, a Liberal newspaper denounced that 65 National Guards, many of them veterans of the Paraguayan War and reputed to be *capoeiras*, had been transferred to the Glória district, to support Duque-Estrada and the Conservatives. On the day of the election, members of the capoeira gang registered under false names and provoked Liberal voters. In the ensuing conflict, some prominent citizens got sliced up by the razor of Augusto César de Lima, the *malta* leader. Despite these actions, he openly sat in the parish church next to Duque-Estrada, who, in his function of justice of the peace, had to oversee the election process. No wonder the Conservatives won the elections in the district. Duque-Estrada referred to his capoeira aides as the 'flower of my people', and that expression subsequently became the name of the *malta*.<sup>101</sup>

Capoeira gangs have often been condemned because of their employment by political parties during the Empire. There can be no doubt that they contributed to exacerbate political violence and to render elections farcical. C.E. Soares has argued, however, that one should not take the manipulation of *capoeiras* by politicians for granted. As his research demonstrates, the *malts* hired by politicians nonetheless pursued their own agenda. Whether one wants to subscribe to his idea of a 'capoeira party' or not, the fact remains that the close relationship between *capoeiras* and politicians also resulted in considerable rewards for the *capoeiras*: they gained impunity, autonomy of action, and influence.<sup>102</sup>

### The republican purge

The alliance between Nagoas and the Conservatives on one side, and Guaiamus and the Liberals on the other meant that repression of *capoeiras* by authorities was usually partial, and therefore ineffective. It was restricted to the gangs affiliated with the opposition party excluded from power, whereas the *malts* supporting the government or local authorities enjoyed protection. However, this basic scheme was complicated by a number of factors. First, links between *capoeiras* and the Liberals were never as solid as with the Conservatives. The Conservative party was primarily the party of power, constituting the government for most of the Empire and thus better placed to offer protection to gangs. Moreover, Liberals were more reluctant to rely on *capoeiras*, since their political strategy consisted in mobilizing, and even extending, the popular vote and in advocating clean elections, which, they thought, would mainly benefit them. Liberal newspapers therefore often denounced the manipulation of ignorant black voters, especially freedmen, supposed to only follow voting instructions from their former masters. The Conservatives, on the other hand, managed to build up a strong clientele among the black population. After the abolition of slavery in May 1888—a law passed by a Conservative government—they succeeded in mobilizing former slaves and more generally blacks in support of the ailing monarchical regime. The Black Guard, created in July of that year, brought together those who were ready to use violent means for that end, and most prominently among them, the *capoeiras*.<sup>103</sup>

Given that even the movement for the abolition of slavery had made arrangements with some capoeira gangs, the Republican party, founded in 1870, was one of the few political organizations of the Empire

which consequently opposed the *malts*. For the Republicans in Rio, therefore, the *capoeiras* came to epitomize everything that was rotten in the political system of the Empire: violence, corruption, and backwardness. Inspired by revolutionary Jacobin fervour, they decided to eradicate this scourge once and for all. João Baptista Sampaio Ferraz—reputedly a practitioner of the art himself—became the key figure in this purge. As a public attorney he learned how easy it was for many *capoeiras* to escape punishment during the Empire, given their wide spun network of support. Ferraz was appointed police chief of the capital immediately after the Republican coup of 15 November 1889. With the support of the Ministry of Justice new, radical measures against the *capoeiras* were adopted in the city. In just one week, from 12–18 of December, 111 individuals were arrested for allegedly being *capoeiras*. During the following months, hundreds more were detained. The strategy consisted in getting hold of them at home, according to lists drawn up by the police, rather than wait and capture them *in flagrante*. A substantial number of the arrested were deported to the distant Atlantic island Fernando de Noronha. According to a monarchist writer denouncing the Republican dictatorship, at least 162 individuals were being kept there for being *capoeiras*.<sup>104</sup>

No doubt only the dictatorial powers of the provisional Republican government, disregarding fundamental citizen's rights of trial and habeas corpus, provided Ferraz with the means to cut through the web of solidarities and stamp out the gangs. By not establishing patron/client relationships with the Republican party or the Jacobins in the armed forces, the hitherto powerful Guaiamus and Nagoas had outmanoeuvred themselves, and they were to disappear together with the political structure and parties of the Empire.<sup>105</sup>

The Republican Criminal Code, issued by the Provisional Government in 1890, sought to maintain the harsh repression against *capoeiragem*. To provide better means to that end, the code explicitly qualified capoeira as a crime in its Chapter XIII, dedicated to vagrants and *capoeiras*. Articles 402–4 threatened with two to six months of jail anybody found doing

[...] exercises of physical agility and dexterity, known by the denomination *capoeiragem*, in the streets and public squares; to run amok, provoking disorder and mayhem, and threatening, frightening or injuring specific or unspecified individuals.<sup>106</sup>

Belonging to a gang was considered an aggravating circumstance; and twice the ordinary penalty was to be imposed on gang leaders. Foreigners were to be deported once they had served their jail sentence.

For a long time historians have assumed that the end of the famous *malts* resulted in the definitive demise of *capoeiragem* in the city. As Liberac Pires has shown, however, Cariocan capoeira did survive the Republican purge, even though weakened. Pires identified 300 court cases of the period 1893–1935 in which accusations were made on the basis of the infamous articles 402–4, and reckons the list is far from complete.<sup>107</sup> In most cases, *capoeiras* seem to have extorted money from merchants, those of Portuguese origins in particular. The high proportion of acquittals (76 per cent) also suggest that authorities used the incrimination of *capoeiragem* as an easy way to bring young, lower class males behind bars. Pires also discovered evidence for the re-emergence of gangs, headed by individuals such as the famous Bexiga ('Smallpox') or Peixe Frito ('Fried Fish'). He further suggests that Ferraz's frantic purge only served to dismantle the gangs linked to the former imperial parties. But some republican politicians, such as the Baron of Drumond—the inventor of the most popular illegal gambling, the Jogo do Bicho—mounted new webs of political patronage using *capoeiras*. Many *capoeiras* also became bodyguards of Republican politicians.<sup>108</sup>

Yet during the First Republic (1889–1930) capoeira definitively lost the public preeminence it had enjoyed during the Empire. It seems that the link between the different modalities—from friendly to rough



games and real fights—was almost completely severed. Bodyguards and other people only interested in fighting techniques used its attacks as weapon but no longer showed any interest in the game. Street *rodas* apparently disappeared, although they may have survived in some shantytowns, such as the hills of São Carlos or Salgueiro or some working-class suburbs.<sup>109</sup> When rival carnival associations started a fight, capoeiro techniques could suddenly re-emerge.<sup>110</sup> The skill that consisted in administering unbalancing kicks to the rhythm of drums also survived in another game, the *batuque*. The Cariocan *batuque* remained visible, especially during carnival. The poetess Cecília Meireles observed it during the 1930s:

[...] During carnival, in the stronghold of Praça Onze [central square in Rio], they dance it endlessly, and since the nature of the black in Brazil is good and conciliatory [sic], the kick which they use are only sketched, and it even happens that one dancer keeps the other's balance holding him in his arms while, at the same time, he throws him off balance with his foot. The fall is thus frustrated, and the game continues. That is why, in their language, they call it 'the game'.<sup>111</sup>

The subterranean survival of capoeira in some shantytowns and suburbs, as well as the interest of some martial artists (such as Sinhozinho) for its fighting techniques right into the middle of the twentieth century, will be crucial to understanding why Rio de Janeiro could play such an important role in the revival of capoeira as an art and a sport from the 1950s onwards (Chapter 7). The substantial changes capoeira, its social context and its cultural meaning underwent throughout the nineteenth century in Rio de Janeiro should also warn us against simplistic assumptions about combat games representing ancestral practices remaining unchanged over centuries. The comparison and contrast with capoeira in Bahia, examined in the next chapter, will confirm how important the local context was for the evolution of the art.





## Workers, vagrants and tough guys in Bahia , c.1860–1950

Bahia, our Bahia  
 The capital is Salvador  
 He who doesn't know capoeira  
 Can't give it its true value  
 (*Ladainha* or capoeira 'prayer' as sung by M.Pastinha)

### Imperial Bahia

#### Salvador and the Bay of All The Saints

Since colonial times the development of Salvador has been intrinsically linked to the plantation economy of its hinterland, the Recôncavo. The term stands for the area surrounding the Bay of All the Saints (see [Figure 4.1](#)). Its clay soils—the heavy *massapês* or the lighter *salões*—resulted ideal for growing sugar cane and contributed to make the Recôncavo one of the key sugar producing regions of colonial Brazil. The first cane plantations and sugar mills, using Mediterranean techniques and native Brazilian slave labour, were founded as early as the 1530s. Working and living conditions under slavery as well as 'Old World' diseases resulted in the rapid extermination of the natives, so that already by the 1580s the majority of the field hands on the plantations had been substituted by Africans. During the seventeenth century the Recôncavo became the prime sugar-producing region of the world. The owners of the sugar mills, or *engenhos* (a short form for the production unit consisting of the cane fields and the mill where the cane was processed into sugar) constituted, together with the merchants, the elite of colonial society.<sup>1</sup>

Even though sugar production in the Recôncavo shared many features with other plantation regions of the Americas, some peculiarities are worth mentioning. The technicalities of sugar making required a sizeable group of skilled workers on each *engenho*, many of which were slaves, thus contributing to the social differentiation among the captive population. Sugar cane was not only grown by mill owners, but also by cane farmers called *lavradores*. If a regular sugar mill needed at least 100 slaves to plant the sugar and keep the mill working, *lavradores* cultivated smaller plots of land with as few as half a dozen or a dozen slaves. They depended on the mill owners for the processing of their cane, who often also were the owners of the land they cultivated. As a result, *lavradores* were subjected to mill owners by a variety of mechanisms and often resented that dependency. Even though they all aspired to become mill owners, most never managed to climb up the social ladder. They therefore constituted an important middle sector of rural society. During the eighteenth century many cane farmers were of mixed ancestry or 'coloured'. The existence of

small-scale slavery and a middle class of petty slave owners contributed to stabilize slavery as an institution.

Plantations, especially in the initial phase, were located along the bay or its contributing rivers, and therefore transportation to and from the export harbour Salvador was almost exclusively done by water. Since the semi-arid interior of the colony, known as the *sertão*, could only be used for extensive cattle farming, mill owners preferred to buy beasts of burdens and salted meat there and to concentrate on sugar planting rather than to diversify their activities. Complementary activities developed, however, in the areas not suitable for sugar, mainly in the western and southern part of the Recôncavo. Manioc flour, the main staple food for slaves and the poor free population, as well as other subsistence crops, such as beans or maize, was grown in the districts of Nazaré das Farinhas and Maragojipe. Most of the subsistence farmers were of modest means, although many employed a few slaves. The development of a strong subsistence sector not too distant from the *engenhos* allowed sugar planters to neglect subsistence agriculture themselves.<sup>2</sup>

Another important feature of the Recôncavo economy was the development of tobacco farming from the seventeenth century onwards. Tobacco was planted all along the southern shore of the Recôncavo, but cultivation concentrated especially in the area of Cachoeira and São Felix. Whilst tobacco cultivation was also based on slave labour, it also tended to be produced in smaller units than the average sugar *engenho*. Contrary to sugar, most of the tobacco was shipped directly to West African ports, and the profits reinvested in the acquisition of slaves. This bilateral trade stood apart within the wider transatlantic economy, usually characterized by European merchants operating a triangular trade, first taking weapons and other commodities to the African ports, then embarking slaves there for sale in the Americas, and finally shipping colonial products back to Europe. The bilateral trade between Salvador to the Bight of Benin had important consequences not only for the economy, but also for the culture on both sides of the Atlantic. With ships leaving Salvador directly for the African coast the return to their homeland became a concrete possibility for freed West Africans. Thousands left (and some were deported) in the second part of the nineteenth century, constituting communities of 'Brazilians' in cities like Porto Novo or Lagos. Ongoing links between ports on both sides of the Atlantic also implied that the rupture with their African origins was not complete, as was the case in most other plantation colonies. West Africans and their descendants in Bahia could therefore maintain an—albeit limited—communication with their homelands. Some actually carved out a living by trading with West African products in Bahia such as textiles and cowries.<sup>3</sup>

In summary, the economy of the Recôncavo was much more diversified than the image traditional accounts tend to paint. Sugar was king, but many other market orientated activities provided a living for a heterogeneous rural middle class. If society was divided between few sugar mill owners at the top and the mass of field slaves at the bottom, a complex hierarchy, consisting of skilled slaves, subsistence farmers and small-scale slave owners, however, filled the space in between. The different sectors of the agriculture based around the Bay of All the Saints relied on an intense network of trade linking the many ports of the Recôncavo with each other. Fishermen, small traders and street vendors, ship owners and the crew of *saveiros* and other vessels represented further significant groups of the Bahian society.

Salvador, also called the City of Bahia, constituted the neuralgic centre of this relatively populated and economically integrated region. Located on the northern edge of the Bay of All the Saints, the city developed around the port. All sugar and other export products converged here before being shipped abroad. The port was also an important relay for the trade along the Brazilian coast of, for instance, foodstuff such as manioc flour or fish. No wonder that the commercial area of the city developed centrally, near the port area. Yet Salvador was more than just a major port. From 1549 to 1763 it harboured the capital of colonial Brazil, concentrating the administrative and ecclesiastic bureaucracy and some important

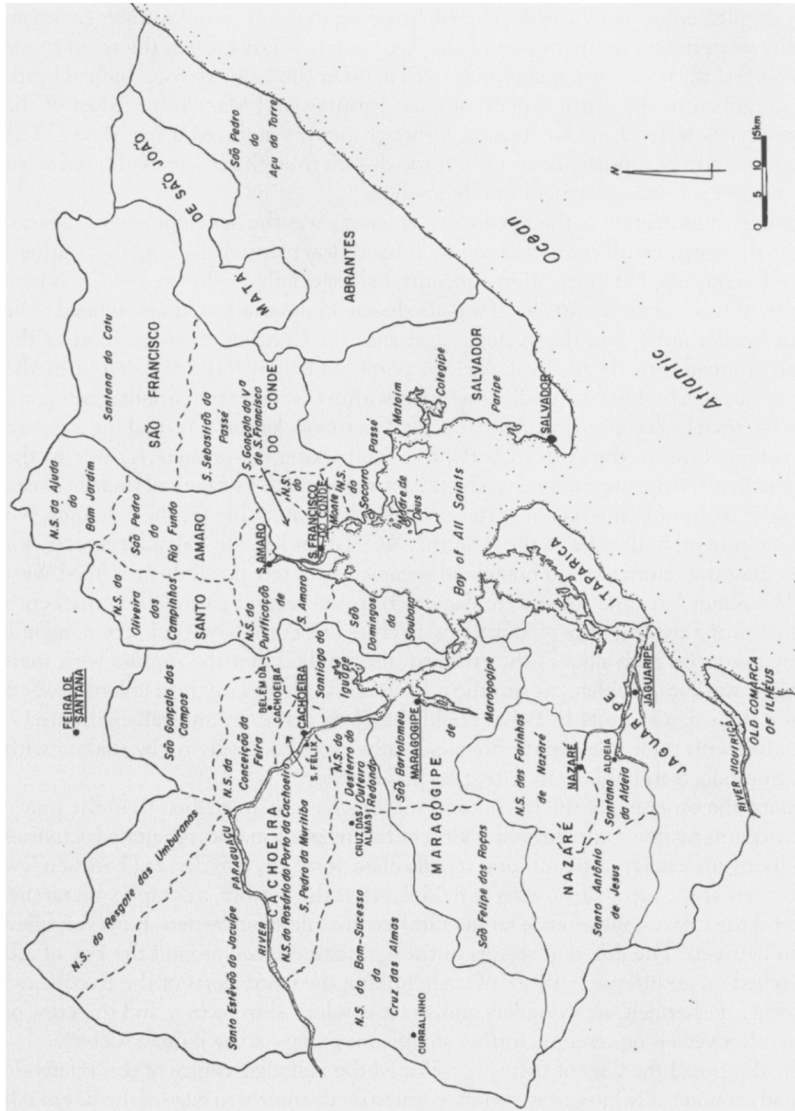


Figure 4.1 Townships and parishes in the Recôncavo in the mid-nineteenth century. From Bert Barrickman, *A Bahian Counterpoint: Sugar, Tobacco and Slavery in the Recôncavo*. Copyright 1999 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Jr. University. With the permission of the Stanford University Press, [www.sup.org](http://www.sup.org).

institutions of colonial society, such as the Jesuit seminar. As a result, a tiny, white elite dominated the political and cultural life of what many observers perceived as being an almost African city.

Although not the size of Rio de Janeiro, Salvador in the early nineteenth century was still one of the major Atlantic cities with an impressive slave population. Population figures prior to the first national census of 1872 are not entirely reliable, but João Reis estimated the population of the city at 65,500 for the year 1835.<sup>4</sup> The 27,500 slaves represented 42 per cent of that total. Less than a third of the city's inhabitants, or 28.2 per cent, were considered white, whilst the free 'coloured' population amounted to 22.7 per cent and the free Africans to 7.1 per cent. Since Africans constituted the majority of the slave population (63 per cent), as much as one third of Salvador's population was African during the first decades of the nineteenth century. The numerous African languages heard in the streets of the city invariably impressed foreign observers. Slave traders deported their human cargo from two major areas: West Africa and Kongo/Angola. (In the older literature slaves from these areas are often referred to as 'Sudanese' and 'Bantu'.)<sup>5</sup> Historians distinguish several cycles, during which slave imports from one particular region predominated: Senegambia in the late sixteenth century, Kongo/Angola in the seventeenth century and the Mina Coast and the Bight of Benin in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet even during the last cycle, Bantu slaves from Congo and Angola still constituted about a third of all Africans in Bahia.<sup>6</sup>

Slave life in the city of Bahia was to a large extent similar to that in Rio de Janeiro already and discussed in [Chapter 3](#). The urban condition implied a greater heterogeneity of individual situations. Some slaves held relatively comfortable positions as domestics in the smart residences of the upper town Vitória parish. *Mucamas* were in intimate contact with masters, and so were others whose job consisted in making their owner's life as pleasant as possible. Skilled slaves executed qualified work for their artisan masters in workshops spread around the city. The large majority, however, slaved in harsher jobs. Slaves 'for hire' (*escravos de ganho* or *ganhadores*) were employed in all the menial tasks despised by slaveholders with contempt for manual labour, and most especially in portage. *Escravos de ganho* and freedmen waited for customers at specific street corners, called *cantos*, often organized along ethnic lines (see [Figure 4.2](#)).<sup>7</sup>

The example of the *cantos* reveals that slavery or freedom was not the only relevant polarity in the social construction of identity. The conditions of urban slavery and the concentration of so many Africans in a relatively small area made it possible for slaves and freedmen from similar ethnic backgrounds to gather together and reproduce some important aspects of their African heritage, regardless of their condition. This however did not occur without important adaptations and adjustments. If slave culture, in both its sacred and profane dimensions, was, to a large extent, segmented along ethnic lines, boundaries were far from rigid. As we have seen in [Chapter 2](#), three major neo-African 'nations' emerged in Salvador, which amalgamated smaller groups sharing similar cultural or linguistic backgrounds: Angola, Jeje and Nagô. Some further subdivisions survived, which reflected original African provenance or political allegiances. Thus Ijexá, Ketu, and Ijebú—all identified as Nagô—initially related to specific Yoruba kingdoms. As the slave and free black population became increasingly creolized during the nineteenth century, these political and ethnic identities became primarily liturgical and cultural ones.

Religion was the area of social life around which popular culture coalesced. The celebration of patron saints represented the most visible aspect of popular religion and culture in Salvador and the Recôncavo since at least the nineteenth century. Each festival took place in and around the parish church dedicated to a saint. In Salvador the annual cycle of festivities was opened on 4 December with the celebrations for Santa Barbara in the commercial Baixa dos Sapateiros, followed by those for Nossa Senhora da Conceição da Praia on 8 December and Santa Luzia do Pilar, on 13 December, both located near the waterfront in the port area. After the Christmas period, the festivals of Boa Viagem, on 1 January, and especially Bomfim, on the second Thursday in January, attracted a wide audience from all over the city. The celebrations in the fisher



Figure 4.2 Old African porters at a canto, Bahia. An important, and often-neglected, social context for the development of modern capoeira. Postcard by an unknown photographer, from Arthur Ramos, *O folclore negro do Brasil: Demopsychologia e psicanalyse* (2nd edn, Rio de Janeiro: Caso do Estudante do Brasil, 1954).

hamlet Rio Vermelho on 2 February, dedicated to Sant'Ana (or the *orixá* Iemanjá), the patron saint of fishermen, represented the last of the major religious festivals. Carnival then closed the annual cycle of celebrations in the city of Bahia.

In the towns of the Recôncavo the festivals dedicated to patron saints provided a similar framework for the annual cycle of celebrations for both the slave and the free population. In Santo Amaro in the sugar belt, for instance, 2 February was dedicated to the town's patron Our Lady of the Purification which constituted the culminating point of the nine days of celebrations.

### *Nineteenth-century capoeira*

In contrast to Rio de Janeiro, documentary evidence for the practice of capoeira in Bahia during the Brazilian Empire (1822–1889) is scarce. Prior to the 1860s, only a couple of paintings might have some connection with the later practice of capoeira. For instance, two early nineteenth-century water colours, of unknown authorship, offer different views of the city of Salvador, with buildings, and squares featuring inhabitants pursuing different occupations. Among them some characters, most likely blacks, are performing movements in the streets. They could be executing a dance but eventually this might also be an allusion to some more martial game.<sup>8</sup> Yet, in my opinion, these paintings do not allow any further conclusions regarding the existence of capoeira in Salvador.

A far more significant iconographic source is Rugendas' engraving of Salvador (see Figure 4.3). The scene is set in a clearing surrounded by tropical vegetation and palm trees, corresponding precisely to the space called *capoeira* in Brazil. Four of the nine characters—all black or mulattos—are performing movements, three of which can be identified as some kind of martial game or dance. Two are facing each other in what resembles the *ginga* (the twentieth-century basic step in capoeira); a third man is assuming a low position, quite similar to the capoeira defence movement called *negativa* ('negation'). The five other characters are watching, talking to each other or cuddling. As many commentators have noted, the setting corresponds exactly to what slaves would do when not watched by their master. Furthermore, the association between martial games and *capoeira*, in its native Brazilian meaning of a forest clearing, is undeniable. Rugendas, however, does not make any comment about this scene in the text of his work. In contemporary capoeira



Figure 4.3 The earliest image of a combat match in Bahia. Slaves and freedmen preferred to socialize well away from their masters' sight, for instance on this clearing—*capoeira*—on the Itapagipe peninsula, on the outskirts of the city. 'San Salvador'. Engraving after Johann Moritz Rugendas, from *Voyage Pittoresque dans le Brésil* (Paris: Engelmann & Compagnie, 1835). By kind permission of the British Library, London.

circles this engraving is always—and in my view, incorrectly—linked to his other one explicitly entitled 'Capoeira', most likely to be located in Rio de Janeiro and already discussed in Chapters 1 and 3. In my opinion there is absolutely no convincing evidence that Rugendas depicted what is defined today as capoeira in his San Salvador engraving; it could be any other form of Afro-Bahian martial art, such as the *batuque*. Nonetheless his engraving proves the centrality of male combat games in early nineteenth-century Afro-Bahian culture.

In the second half of the nineteenth century other, more substantial sources confirm that capoeira, in its widest and generic meaning, already existed in Salvador. In James Wetherell's diary, only published after his death, an entry headed 'Blacks' for the year 1856 reads as follows:

Negroes fighting with their open hands is a frequent scene in the lower city. They seldom come to blows, or at least sufficient to cause any serious damage. A kick on the shins is about the most painful knock they give each other. They are full of action, capering and throwing their arms and legs about like monkeys during their quarrels. It is a ludicrous sight.<sup>9</sup>

Comparing the blacks' movements with monkeys certainly reflects the author's eurocentric prejudices but could nevertheless also express some degree of objectivity, since the imitation of animals' moves is a recurrent theme among capoeira practitioners. Wetherell is ambiguous in his description, first classifying it as a 'fight', and then suggesting it was not really serious. Furthermore, his indication that this scene is frequent in the lower part of the city is crucial in so far as this is the first known reference of a martial game being played in the port area. Not calling it capoeira or giving it any name at all might be attributed to his unfamiliarity with slave culture. On the other hand, he is acquainted enough with slave music to give a description of the different instruments bondsmen used, including a detailed account of the *berimbau*.<sup>10</sup>



Since his mention of the *berimbau* in the diary is from the same year and does not establish any link with the martial game, one can only conclude that at the time both were probably not yet associated.

The first written evidence—known so far—of an Afro-Bahian combat game being called capoeira consists of several brief mentions in the newspaper *Alabama* during the years 1866–1870.<sup>11</sup> They refer to capoeira in different contexts and reflect the newspaper's contempt for the practice. These articles suggest that at the time some features of Bahian capoeira strongly resembled its Cariocan counterpart. In Salvador, just as in Rio, capoeira gangs based on neighbourhoods were accused of promoting 'disorder' (*turbulências*). They consisted of black youngsters (*moleques*) with a strong sense of local community. In one instance the newspaper describes how

The *moleques* of Santo Antonio came, wearing a blue cap as a sign of recognition, with their flag, to attack these from the Sant'Ana neighbourhood.

Even two sailors took part in the quarrel.

The combat turned serious. The fighters became violent, and this resulted in many head wounds and [other] injuries and at the final outcome of the struggle was the loss of the flag by the Santo Antonio neighbourhood.<sup>12</sup>

Manoel Querino in his later account also mentioned violent clashes between *capoeiras* from rival neighbourhoods, and singled out the central Sé parish as the 'strongest'. He specified that each neighbourhood gang carried a Brazilian flag that the winner of such a brawl took away from the defeated gang.<sup>13</sup>

Another article in the *Alabama* reproduced a request addressed to the police chief asking the authorities to prevent 'boys to go up the church towers to toll and ring the bells'. This suggests that the practice so common among *caxinguelés* (apprentice *capoeiras*) in Rio de Janeiro also bothered priests and authorities in Salvador.

All nineteenth-century sources leave no doubt about the Afro-Bahian background of the *capoeiras*. Significant in that respect is the portrayal written by the poet Manoel Rozentino (?—1897):

I love the *capadocio* [idle person, and by extension, a capoeira] from Bahia  
This eternal happy man,  
Who walks by provocative  
Brandishing his club.

I love the petulant *capoeira*,  
The sardonic *cabra* [goat, dark mulatto, also a tough guy]  
The terror of the *batuque*, the troublemaker,  
Who always walks with his pair of compasses [sentence not clear, can also have the meaning 'in tune with the music']  
[...Rozentino then describes how he starts to contemplate a *capadocio* in the port area, sitting on a box and fixing his slipper:]  
As he saw me standing nearby,  
He exhibited a large smile,

And told me in a unfriendly manner  
Get lost, white man!<sup>14</sup>

This poem suggests that animosity could run high between black *capoeiras* and white, middle-class men and confirms the close association between *vadição* and blackness in that period. Yet other references show that, as in Rio de Janeiro, capoeira practice also spread beyond its original African constituency. One article in the *Alabama*, for instance, mentions a gang (*súcia de capoeiras*) meeting on the Saude Square. Prominent among them was the mulatto (*pardo*) Luiz, a slave, ‘who always walks around with a knife, which he displays to prove his guts’. Another article explains that the head butt was not any longer used by the ‘black kids’ (*classe moleca*) alone, since an upper-class youth (*baronete*) had used foot kicks in a fight. Further references emphasize that national guards and municipal employees indulged in the practice of capoeira.<sup>15</sup> According to Querino, some capoeira gangs—presumably those constituted by literate middle-class youngsters—even exchanged handwritten pamphlets before their confrontations, and sought inspiration from epic warrior tales about Charlemagne or Napoleon.<sup>16</sup>

The War of Paraguay (1865–1870) and the resulting compulsory draft for the Brazilian army contributed towards greater public exposure of the Bahian *capoeiras*. At least this is the reason why several articles in the *Alabama* mention the art. One reported that a young black, member of the citizens’ militia, the National Guard, resisted conscription into the regular army. ‘Trained in capoeira’ he kicked the forefront of one of the two policemen trying to arrest him, which knocked the officer to the ground. Another article complained that ‘the *capoeiras* continue to walk around at night to make trouble’ whilst the single children of widows, minors or even slaves are drafted into the army.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the complaints of the *Alabama*, a substantial number of Bahian *capoeiras* was recruited and did fight in the Paraguay War. Some went on their own will, many others only through coercion. Even hundreds of slaves were among the 15,000 plus soldiers the province of Bahia sent to Paraguay; they were freed for serving the fatherland.<sup>18</sup> Manuel Querino reports that the *capoeira* soldiers distinguished themselves in assaults with bayonet, and traces the profile of two of them, one from Bahia and the other from Pernambuco.<sup>19</sup> Many capoeiristas today emphasize the role *capoeiras* played in the war, yet none of these accounts relies on any additional evidence other than the brief passage provided by Querino. Given the constraints of army discipline and European-style warfare adopted by the Brazilian commanders, I found the common idea of whole groups of soldiers systematically using capoeira kicks in battle rather unconvincing. Nevertheless the War of Paraguay was crucial for the history of capoeira, albeit for other reasons.

As already suggested in [Chapter 3](#), the war constituted a major watershed not only in politics, but also in Brazilian social and cultural history. Thousands of young males from all Brazilian provinces and different ethnic and social backgrounds lived and fought together against a common enemy. It is likely that important exchanges regarding fighting techniques, including capoeira, occurred during that shared life in the barracks. Perhaps the war even reinforced the use of the term ‘capoeira’ throughout Brazil. The War of Paraguay resulted in an unprecedented patriotic mobilization, a growing awareness of belonging to a Brazilian nation, which profoundly altered Brazilian civic culture.

In the City of Bahia the war was at the origin of popular manifestations such as the ‘pilgrimage of the police’, which celebrated the return of the police corps from the battlefields.<sup>20</sup> As in other cities, the names of famous battles won by the Brazilian armed forces were profusely used to christen streets and squares. Given this wider context and the participation of *capoeiras* in the war, one should not wonder then that some of the oldest identifiable references in capoeira songs mention places and events associated with the

War of Paraguay, such as ‘Humaitá’, ‘City of Asunción’ and possibly ‘Paranaê’.<sup>21</sup> The song ‘I was at home’ tells the story of a man at home, ‘not thinking nor imagining anything’, ‘when someone knocked on the door, Solomon asked for him, to help win the War of Paraguay’.<sup>22</sup> It is rather here that the significance of the war for the history of capoeira lies.

### *The aftermath of abolition*

The emancipation of the bondsmen who fought in the War of Paraguay also contributed to undermining slavery. The institution had been under attack for several decades until abolition was finally brought about in 1888. International pressure, the Abolitionist movement mainly supported by the urban middle classes, as well as the slaves’ own struggle for freedom all contributed to that outcome. The more entrepreneurial planters—mainly located in the Southeast—had already provided for alternative solutions (free immigrant labour) whilst granting concessions to make the transition as gradual and orderly as possible. The final demise of slavery came therefore as no great surprise for most slave owners. In Bahia, however, a significant number of planters stuck their head in the sand and ignored the winds of change. As a result, abolition disrupted sugar production in the Recôncavo and hastened the decline of the industry. During the first decades of the twentieth century cacao became the prime product of the Bahian economy. Yet cacao was only cultivated in the southern part of the Bahia, in the coastal region around Itabuna, which therefore became the new agricultural powerhouse of the state. Sugar production, albeit in decline, continued to rule in the Recôncavo.

How much change did abolition bring? If contemporary accounts insist on the epic battle to overthrow slavery and highlight the heroism of local abolitionists, later research tends to emphasize continuities. As the Black Movement likes to point out today, formal freedom for slaves was not accompanied by access to land or education, and thus it was a ‘false’ abolition. Many former slaves had no alternative other than to continue toiling on plantations or sugar factories. Some tried to retreat into the subsistence economy, which was not easy in the case of the Recôncavo, where planters had monopolized access to land for centuries. Eventually some estates were broken up and a few fortunate ex-slaves could acquire land. A great number, however, settled on spots not suitable for agriculture along the waterfront and tried to carve out a living from the sea. Fishing and other activities of the sea therefore figure prominently among themes of capoeira songs. One of the most famous *capoeiras* from Santo Amaro, for instance, was nicknamed ‘Swamp crab’ (Siri de Mangue). Many ex-slaves and their descendants from the Recôncavo emigrated further south into the cacao belt or moved to the cities, especially those of the Southeast. Among them were many *capoeiras* who contributed to spreading their art (see [Chapter 7](#)).

In summary, the post-emancipation period, in particular the First Republic (1889–1930), was a moment of difficult readjustment for the ‘old mulatto woman’ (*velha mulata*), as Bahia was sometimes called by the Southeastern newspapers. Even for the majority of white or *mestiço* abolitionists, emancipating the slaves had never entailed the elimination of racial hierarchies. The elimination of slave status and of property requirements resulted in the formal equality of blacks and whites, poor and rich under the new constitution (1891). Therefore alternative mechanisms to assert white and elite domination became imperative. The disenfranchisement of the former slaves and the uneducated masses was now granted in part through the requirement of literacy for voters. Political clientelism, whereby a powerful landowner or his representative received votes in exchange for favours, further guaranteed elite control of elections and the political process.

The abolition of slavery also required new policies regulating the public sphere. The fear of slave rebellions could no longer justify the repression of Afro-Bahian culture. Initially the post-emancipation years saw a modest public assertion of Afro-Bahians and their culture. In Santo Amaro, for instance,

13 May—the day the Abolition Law was signed by Princess Isabel—started to be commemorated by an annual celebration on the market square, with *candomblé*, *maculêlê*, and *samba de roda*.<sup>23</sup> In Salvador, the ‘African Embassy’ (Embaixada Africana), whilst emulating white elite clubs in its formal aspects (floats, luxury costumes), conveyed a message of pride about African origins and became an important feature of the carnival during the 1890s. Other black carnival associations, such as Pândegos d’África, Chegada Africana and Guerreiros d’África, soon followed its example.

Even though initially welcomed by the press, the occupation of public spaces by black or Afro-Bahian culture soon became a cause of concern for the most intolerant faction of the white elite. Even those ready to admit blacks as citizens were only willing to accept them into the Brazilian nation if they abandoned their African heritage. Great was the fear of missing the train of progress by being too lenient with manifestations of African culture, which were considered inferior. No wonder then that the elites’ quest for civilization meant in practice a new clamp down on Afro-Bahian culture under the banner ‘campaign of civilization against barbarism’. In 1905 the police chief proscribed any parade ‘with African costumes and *batuques*’ during carnival, a ban reiterated annually at least until 1913.<sup>24</sup>

Bahian newspapers also campaigned against *candomblé* practitioners, accused of illegal practice of medicine, witchcraft (curandeirismo), and other crimes. Every so often they reported horror tales on what supposedly happened during Afro-Bahian rituals and urged for police action. State intervention in *candomblé* shrines resumed during the First Republic, especially in the 1920s whilst Pedro Gordilho was sub-chief of the police. He made the police invade *terreiros*, arrest priests and destroy or confiscate cult objects.<sup>25</sup> The measures taken against capoeira *rodas* in the public space were an integral part of this systematic attempt to eradicate Afro-Bahian manifestations. It is in this ambivalent context of post-emancipation that Bahian capoeira evolved, and acquired what can be considered its ‘classical’ form during the first decades of the twentieth century.

### ‘Vagrancy’ in Bahia, c.1890–1950

Boca Rica is a nice guy  
He plays his Angola, and plays very well *berimbau*  
Boca Rica is a master of capoeira  
He sells onions and tomatoes at the market<sup>26</sup>

### *The social context of vadição*

From roughly the turn of the century onwards, the density of sources on capoeira increases considerably. A comparison between the first ethnographic accounts by M. Querino, E. Carneiro and A. Viana, and the growing coverage of newspapers and oral history allow us to draw a more accurate and detailed picture of the art during the post-emancipation period (ca. 1890–1950) in Salvador and the Recôncavo. Even though capoeira, or *vadição* as it was commonly called,<sup>27</sup> could be played any time and anywhere, three situations appear to be of particular importance in early twentieth-century practice: during breaks in the work place, on Sundays in popular neighbourhoods and in squares during the annual cycle of religious celebrations.

Though the labour of sailors, porters, and stevedores was harsh and strenuous, and required great physical strength, there were also gaps between the moments of back-breaking activity:

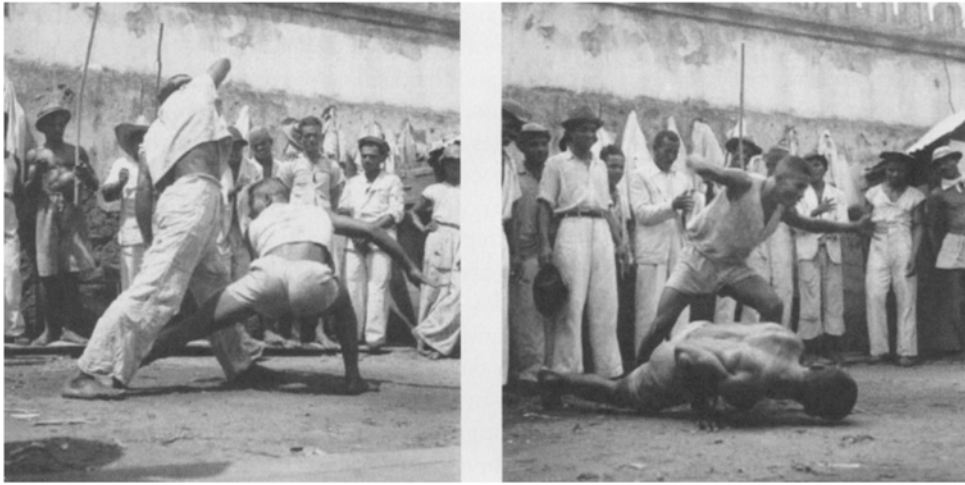


Figure 4.4 *Jogo de dentro* with *cabeçada* (head butt) (left) and *tesoura* ('scissors') (right), both at the ramp near Mercado Modelo, in the port area. Photos by Pierre Verger, 1946–7. By kind permission of the Pierre Verger Foundation.

In the interval of a job (*carreira*), under the weight of sacks and burdens, one turned the body and there [another] one went into the air with a head butt worth of a *mestre*, or went to the ground with the sweeping kick. And, pulling on one single foot, drawing pirouettes, one reassumed one's burden and returned to the job.<sup>28</sup>

There was more time for rest between the arrivals of ships in the harbour. Sources often mention games taking place on the ramp leading to the main market, Mercado Modelo, in the port area. Porters also lingered around their 'corner' waiting for clients. Capoeira, just as the working environment of the harbour, was a predominantly male world (see Figure 4.4).

Yet capoeira was also played in the lower-class neighbourhoods, in particular on Sunday afternoons. Any open space would serve the purpose, but sometimes practitioners erected special barracks (*barracões*) with palm-thatched roofs.<sup>29</sup> The districts listed by Edison Carneiro as holding regular *rodas* included 'proletarian neighbourhoods' all over the city, from Massaranduba to Retiro, and from Capelinha de São Caetano to Amaralina.<sup>30</sup> Undoubtedly during those gatherings informal apprenticeship took place. This kind of local practice also developed neighbourhood identity and solidarity, in particular in the more recent quarters of the city that was growing steadily beyond its established core areas. Noronha lists as many as 35 different *morros* (hills and shantytowns), which he and his group used to visit on Sundays, and in all of them 'there were only tough *capoeirista* [who knew how] to give and take'.<sup>31</sup> Capoeira was also played on the open space in front of a bar. On these occasions it was common for capoeiras to consume alcohol between games. Sometimes they performed in order to obtain money or drinks from spectators or the owner of the bar.<sup>32</sup>

Capoeira became even more visible during the different festivals celebrated in the city and the surrounding Recôncavo. Between August and November each gangway (*escada*) along the quayside in Salvador's harbour organized its own commemoration. These 'gangway fiestas' aggregated different categories of port workers, sailors, ship owners and tradesmen using that particular point. It was usually

sponsored by a wealthier merchant house, and entailed a pilgrimage by water to one of the churches on the waterfront, such as Bomfim or Monte Serrat. Playing capoeira intermingled with other recreational activities carried out in a circle (*roda*) accompanied by Afro-Bahian music and dance: *samba*, *batuque* and *bate-coxa*.<sup>33</sup>

Two events followed in November where capoeira *rodas* also took place. On 1 November the marketers of the Largo dos Tamarineiros in the Barra neighbourhood promoted the 'Festa das Tabaroas'.<sup>34</sup> On the last or penultimate Sunday of November the port workers celebrated their patron saint Nicodemus in the port area.<sup>35</sup> The festival of Our Lady of the Conception of the Beach (N.S.da Conceição da Praia), on 8 December, is always remembered as the first major event where capoeiras from all over the city met. Bomfim in January was the other main event for capoeira *rodas*. The celebrations were followed by the 'Fat Monday' in the nearby Ribeira, a popular beach resort. It was here, that, according to Mestre Noronha, 'all the tough guys of the *malandragem* of all the neighbourhoods turned up to show their value'.<sup>36</sup> According to the old *mestres*, after carnival capoeira became less visible in the city.

Capoeira featured prominently in all festivities, generally on the main square, in front of the church, in the middle of the other celebrations. Usually one or several older players, recognized as *mestres*, hold responsibility for the *roda*, or circle. These *rodas* were however open to anybody wanting to play, no special garment being required. The role of the *mestre(s)* in charge consisted in assuring the standards (rhythms, songs, and rituals) and to avoid the game degenerating into an open confrontation.

In neighbourhoods and festivals women were present, although in capoeira only as spectators. Gender roles were clearly expressed or reinforced in Afro-Bahian manifestations. Capoeira was a male-centred activity, whilst women dominated *candomblé*. Only women danced to fall in trance; only men played capoeira. And both danced together in the *samba de roda*.<sup>37</sup> As always, there were exceptions to the rule, but transgressors were subjected to doubts about their sexual orientation. That is why only very few—exceptional—women played capoeira in early twentieth-century Bahia. Oral history remembers mainly Palmeirona (or Palmeirão) and Maria Homem.<sup>38</sup> According to M.Pastinha, who liked to tell their exploits during his own exhibitions, Maria Homem loved to drink at a bar on the Pelourinho Square. On one occasion, a corporal tried to arrest her with two policemen because of her state of inebriation, but was thrown to the ground, followed by other officers who tried the same.<sup>39</sup> Palmeirão was another 'troublemaker' women, based at the Modêlo Market Hall. M.Pastinha asserted that she clipped her skirt between her legs on to her belt. After that she was ready to beat up police officers and throw them to the ground with head butts.<sup>40</sup> The memory of different women using capoeira to challenge police officers seems to have become somehow blurred, since the same story is also told by M.Canjiquinha for a character called Maria Doze Homens, which he said defeated twelve police officers at the Baixa dos Sapateiros.<sup>41</sup> Liberac discovered a court case of a fight between washerwomen in 1900. One was accused of having invaded a shop and stood up against another woman 'in gestures of who plays capoeira trying to beat her'.<sup>42</sup>

The evidence is thin, but what is striking is that all episodes describe women who knew capoeira as inevitably masculinized, as indeed the very name of Maria Homem ('Mary Man') suggests. They are remembered as troublemakers, not as skilful players of the game in a *roda*. The subordinate role male *capoeiras* assigned to 'ordinary' women is expressed in verses such as 'She has golden teeth. I ordered her to put them'. The reinforcement of traditional gender roles through capoeira explains why, later, women had to struggle hard in order to be fully accepted in the *roda*.

The available descriptions make clear that capoeira was, above all, a recreational activity. Participants referred to it as a game (*jogo* or *brincadeira*), or even as vagrancy, idleness (*vadição*).<sup>43</sup> Playing capoeira was also called *vadiar*, meaning to roam or to hang around in the streets, or to be idle. Identifying capoeira with what elites condemned as anti-social behaviour reveals to what extent capoeira was, at its core, a



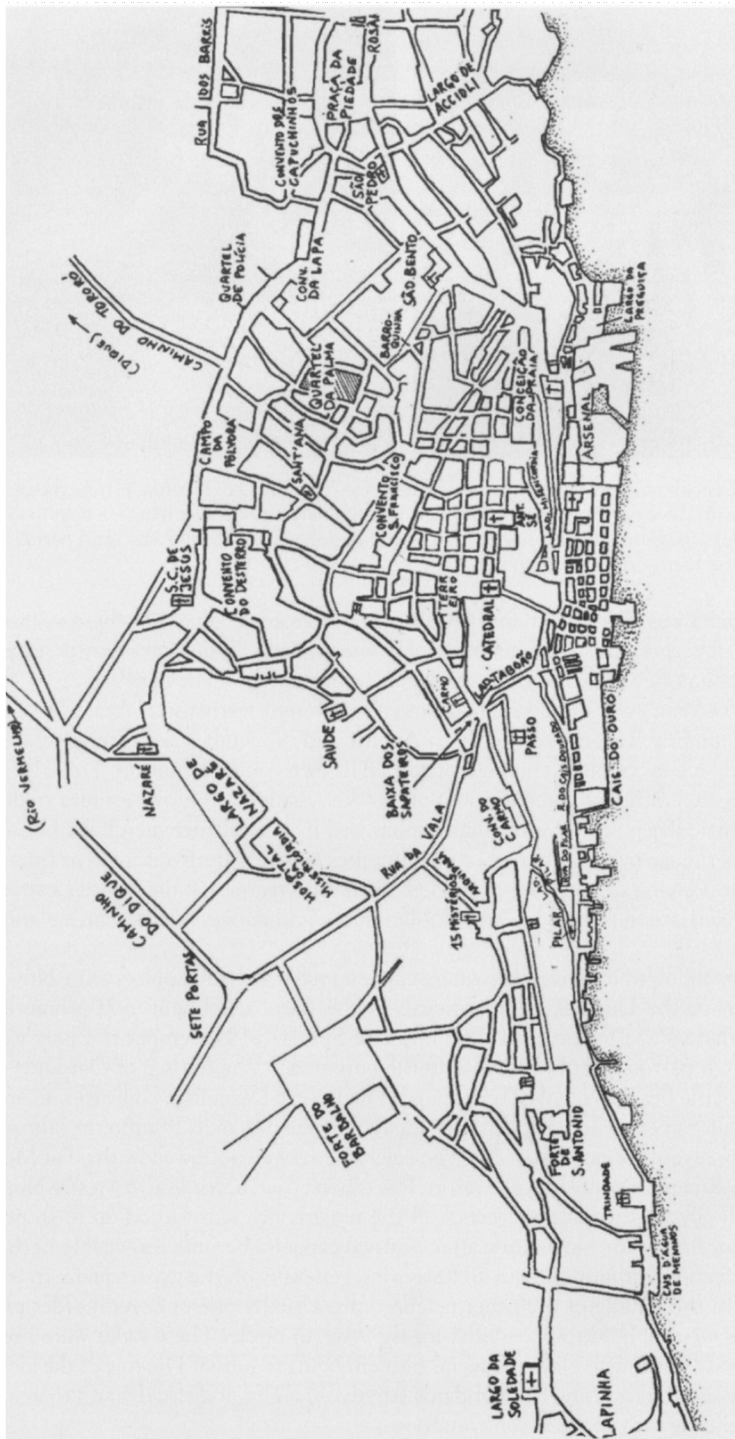


Figure 4.5 City centre of Salvador, 1894, based on the 'Planta da Cidade de São Salvador, Bahia' by A.Morales de Los Rios.



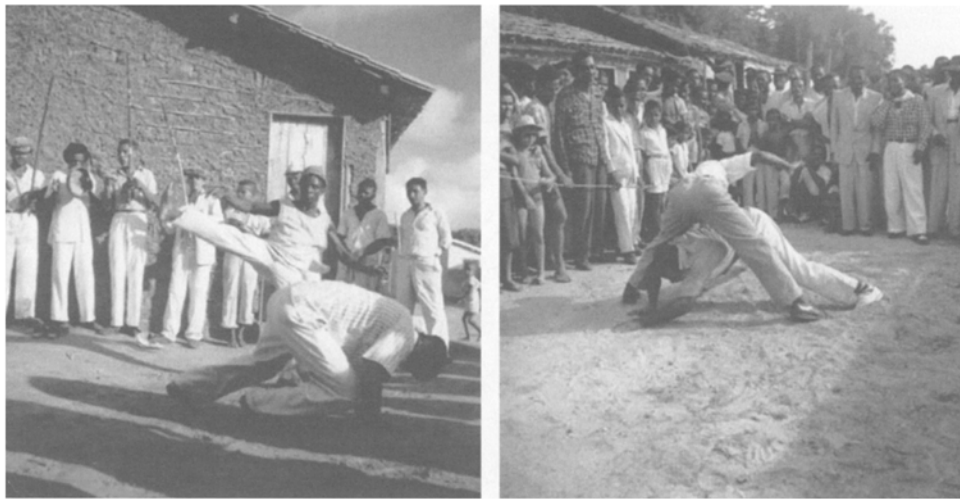


Figure 4.6 Capoeira roda in a neighbourhood, probably Corta Braço in Liberdade; note the orchestra with three berimbau and two pandeiros (left); Sunday Capoeira roda in a neighbourhood, *Jogo de dentro: tesoura* (right). Photos by Pierre Verger, 1946–7. By kind permission of the Pierre Verger Foundation.

refusal to endorse the dominant model of work ethics that lower classes were supposed to follow, and to comment ironically about it. In that respect the dialectics of *malandragem* (discussed in Chapter 3) also applied to Bahian capoeira.

### *Movements, rhythms and games*

What formal aspects characterized capoeira in three contexts mentioned above? Capoeira took place in an imaginary circle (*roda*) formed by the orchestra (*bateria*) and the other participants or spectators. Two players knelt down in front of each other and next to the orchestra, at the ‘foot’ of the *berimbau* (see Figure 4.7). They listened to a preliminary song, called ‘litany’ (*ladainha*), and waited for subsequent ‘praise’ (*reza or canto de entrada*), when some of the standard phrases such as ‘turn around the world’ (‘*volta ao mundo*’) from the lead singer, repeated by the chorus, indicated that the game could begin. Players crossed themselves, drew signs on the ground and started their game. Many capoeira groups today still comply with that basic structure.

The range of movements was much wider and less formalized than those known in the contemporary capoeira Angola style (see Chapter 6). Although players used all the movements familiar to contemporary angoleiros, such as the ‘negation’ (*negativa*), the stingray’s tail (*rabo de arraia*), the whip (*chibata*), the half-moon (*meia lua*), the scissors (*tesoura*), the head butt (*cabeçada*), the cartwheel (*au*) and the sweep (*rasteira*), they also employed movements that are no longer part of standard capoeira Angola today, for instance various types of *balões* (consisting of throwing the other player by holding his neck), the *cutilada* (hand blow) and the *meia lua virada* (‘turned half moon’, a kick similar to the *queixada* used in the capoeira Regional style, albeit not performed from such a high-standing position).<sup>44</sup> There was no absolute consistency in the naming of all the kicks or in the use of them, which explains why subsequently so much controversy over what are or are not ‘true’ capoeira Angola movements developed.<sup>45</sup> Whatever the definitive answer to this still disputed issue, it is clear that all kicks developed from the syncopated basic step or sway (*ginga*) that kept players in permanent movement, and always in tune to the rhythm played by the orchestra.



Figure 4.7 Capoeira *roda* (left) and students of Mestre Juvenal (right) near Mercado Modelo in the port area. Photos by Pierre Verger, 1946–7. By kind permission of the Pierre Verger Foundation.

Most movements require good balance and flexibility, as well as strength, since players often equilibrate themselves on their arms or their head while executing a kick (see Figure 4.7).

There is also some controversy regarding the instruments used in the former *rodas*, in particular regarding the *berimbau* and the drum. E.Carneiro suggested that the *berimbau* might only have been incorporated into capoeira at the beginning of the century. This is consistent with all the nineteenth-century sources already examined. E.L.Powe even reports that M.Pastinha told him that when he learned capoeira only a drum was used.<sup>46</sup> Yet in contrast to contemporary capoeira, all early twentieth-century sources seem to agree that no drum (*atabaque*) was employed, but only *berimbaus* and tambourines (*pandeiros*). They were eventually complemented by some other percussion instruments, such as the *chocalho* (metal rattle), the *reco-reco* (scraper, also called *ganzá* in Bahia) and the *agogô* (metal bell).<sup>47</sup>

According to some sources even small guitars (*violas*, *cavaquinhos*) were sometimes played in capoeira *rodas*, a further indication that at this stage, capoeira was still not an entirely formalized art.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the *berimbaus* were not necessarily restricted to three. M.João Pequeno remembers when four or five *berimbau* players came along with their instrument, they would all play together.<sup>49</sup> Early photographs and drawings of capoeira orchestras confirm this flexibility of the number of *berimbaus* and tambourines. One might argue that in times of police repression, it was difficult to run away with a heavy drum, and thus the introduction of the *berimbau*. This, however, would not explain the absence of the *atabaque* in more permissive environments, such as the square festivals.

Whilst capoeira in all three contexts shared common features, greater informality characterized the practice at the workplace or even in the neighbourhoods. In the latter capoeira was played in everyday clothes, often in shorts, without a shirt and even barefooted. On the docks and gangways players wore working clothes, in general as informal as the everyday attire used in the neighbourhoods. Only during the square exhibitions did players wear more elaborate and formal Sunday dresses. Good players took pride in joining a *roda* with their white linen suit and not have it stained during the game or lose their hat. Despite the acrobatic movements executed close to the ground only hands, feet and head were supposed to touch the

earth. Not to sully the other's clothes was therefore conceivable because players would hardly touch each other. Yet not every player would necessarily wear such elaborate dress during a festive *roda* on a square.

As in Rio de Janeiro the 'professional' Bahian practitioner also developed an idiosyncratic way of dressing, which reflects to what extent he represented a social type and a whole subculture. Mestre Pastinha, among others, described him:

In my time, when I was capoeirista...There were capoeirista who walked around twisted, but twisted in a way that nature did not make him. Because he got a scarf, he would wear a big scarf, trousers with a big hem, with 30cm of hem. There were some made of chagrin leather...The hat thrown to one side...And there he walked, completely twisted, on the left side or on the right side...[...] And he walked in the middle of the street with that sway (*gingado*)! The capoeirista had all this at the time.<sup>50</sup>

Other sources mention the frequent use of golden earrings and pointed boots. *Capoeiras* also liked to carry sticks. Viana explains that the Sunday tie was replaced by a red scarf with a showy pattern during weekdays.<sup>51</sup>

The game consisted in avoiding the other player's attack through an acrobatic escape movement such as the 'negation' (*negativa*) and riposting with a counterattack. The game became therefore a sort of dialogue, where each movement replied to the previous one. Players could show off through particularly acrobatic movements, but also through malice (*malícia*). Malice or deception—also a key concept in modern capoeira—meant to lull the other player into a false sense of security, only to surprise him with a move he was not expecting. However, respect for the other player usually meant not to carry out the attack, but only to show him what one could have done. This was enough to score points in front of an initiated public. A carefully executed *rasteira* or a soft head-butt that threw the other off balance was equally acceptable, although it raised the stake of the game. Full contact was therefore unusual and almost proscribed and, when it happened—due to inattention or provocation—could lead to retaliation and outbreak of violence.<sup>52</sup>

The employment of *malícia* meant that the game did not just represent an athletic competition, where the youngest could show off. Experience was paramount for a skilful game, and for that reason older *mestres* were able to keep in control even when playing with younger *capoeiras*. Carlos Ott was surprised by the many 40 year olds in the rodas he attended, and Jorge Amado admired Samuel 'Beloved of God' for still catching out much younger players when he was already in his sixties.<sup>53</sup>

The capoeira orchestra (*bateria*) played a range of rhythms (*toques*) during a *roda*. Each *toque* consists of a basic rhythmic-melodic pattern and its variations. One *berimbau* (usually the one with the deepest sound, called *gunga* and sometimes *berra-boi*) took the lead, and the others instruments followed, countermarking or varying the basic pattern. The most common *toques* were: São Bento Grande, São Bento Pequeno, Angola, Santa Maria, Angolinha, Jogo de Dentro, Cavalaria.<sup>54</sup> Again, no strict consistency existed regarding both the names and the rhythmic pattern of each *toque*. Some *mestres* gave different names to the same rhythmic pattern, or executed different rhythms to the same *toque*. Often a *toque* particular to only one mestre consisted of a slight variation of a basic rhythm. Each *mestre* played his own range of *toques*, consisting of a combination of the well known ones, performed by almost everybody, and others, sometimes his own or his *mestre's* creation, that expressed his particular style or personality.<sup>55</sup>

Most testimonies agree that games in this period could be tough, but usually did not cross the borderline into real fights. Capoeira players called each other 'comrades' (*camará*), not opponents or fighters. Old *mestres* also insist that players were well aware of the different types of games, which varied according to the *toque* played by the orchestra. Common characterizations differentiated between 'high' and 'low'; 'inside' and 'outside'; fast and slow, and acrobatic, playful or aggressive games. The particular *toques* and



Figure 4.8 Mestre Juvenal defending against a knife attack from a student. Photo by Pierre Verger, 1946–7. By kind permission of the Pierre Verger Foundation.

games thus provided a framework for the different modalities of play. The Angola rhythm, for instance, demanded a slow, ritualistic game, whereas the São Bento Grande required a faster and more antagonistic game. The ‘Apanha laranja no chão, tico-tico’ (‘Pick up the orange from the ground, tico-tico’, also known as Santa Maria) accompanied a game where *capoeiras* tried to pick up a banknote thrown into the *roda* by the audience, without interrupting play. Games played with weapons (knives or razors) could be accompanied by the Benguela *toque* (see Figure 4.8). Although there was a common ground regarding what was acceptable and what could be considered good play, no strict consistency existed between the different *mestres* regarding the modalities of games each of them taught, performed or allowed in the *roda* under their supervision.

Mestre Noronha, for example, describes the games that accompanied the seven *toques* ‘necessary in Capoeira Angola’ as follows:

- Jogo de Dentro: Game of great observation;
- São Bento Grande: Game to prepare kicks;
- São Bento Pequeno: [Game] to undo these kicks;
- Quebra mi com gente macaco: Game for a *balão* at the hem of the trouser (‘balão de boca de calça’);
- Samba de Angola: Game for sweeps and knee-kicks;
- Panha laranja no chão tico tico: High and low game;
- Este negro é o cão: Violent game to give and receive [kicks].<sup>56</sup>

Note that his list only partially coincides with contemporary capoeira Angola *toques* and games. ‘Quebra mi com gente macaco’ and ‘Este negro é o cão’, for instance, are no longer used (albeit the latter is still an often sung *corrido*). The huge range of variations regarding *toques* and games illustrates not only the stylistic diversity but more than that a range of modalities of play, whose ultimate meaning was diverse. Edison Carneiro, perceiving that multiplicity, even thought that they constituted ‘different sorts (*especies*)’

of capoeira' altogether.<sup>57</sup> Yet M. Noronha also insisted that 'the inside game is the most important game [within the Capoeira Angola]', an opinion shared by probably every *angoleiro*.<sup>58</sup>

Since boundaries between rather playful and more antagonistic games were blurred, every *jogo* could potentially cross the borderline and even deteriorate into an open confrontation. Only the *mestres* in charge were able to prevent this by calling the players back to the 'foot' of the *berimbau* to admonish them, or by changing the rhythm or the song. The ambiguity between game and fight resided at the very core of the art. Despite the insistence of many old *mestres* that in this period there was less aggression in capoeira than today, and that friendship reigned between 'comrades', games occasionally did become violent. Capoeira was more than a game; it could be a lethal weapon. We are going to see, however, that most of the violence associated with capoeira in this period did not originate within the *roda*.

Songs were central to the capoeira game. They conjured up memories of *capoeiras* of the past, praised gods and saints and asked them for protection, exhorted players and commented on the ongoing game. Although Querino and Carneiro have transcribed some capoeira lyrics from the first half of the nineteenth century, no song was recorded prior to 1940.<sup>59</sup> We are therefore left with only fragmentary evidence regarding both the formal structure and the contents of songs before that date.

*Capoeiras* drew from a wide repertoire of tradition during each *roda* performance, but they were not bound to a mere, uncreative repetition of existing songs. They rather rearranged known songs, weaving their own biography, convictions and feelings into the lyrics and interpretation. If the refrain sung by the chorus repeated a traditional verse, the solo singer could, after singing some of the well-known verses, fully improvise his part. Usually singers did use older, established verses but inserted others of their own creation, to compose a song that was suited for the particular context of a given performance. In that way they could acknowledge tradition whilst, at the same time, displaying their skills as improvisers. Thus every capoeira song performed in a *roda* constituted an intertextual bricolage. For that reason Rego insisted how dangerous it was to attempt a distinction between 'old' and 'contemporary' capoeira songs in the 1960s—prior to the systematic recordings.<sup>60</sup> His collection of over 100 chants remains the basic source for the study of 'traditional' capoeira lyrics, if we postulate that texts of songs did not alter significantly between the 1940s and the 1960s (and it is in this sense that I use the term 'traditional' here).

In formal terms, capoeira songs of the first half of the twentieth century can be divided into four categories, whose names, again, differed according to each *mestre*.<sup>61</sup> A *roda* usually started with the *mestre* in charge or some other senior person shouting 'Êê!', a sign that he was about to start singing a *ladainha* or 'litany'. The *ladainha* consisted of a solo song, which invoked famous *capoeiras* (such as Besouro Mangangá or Pedro Mineiro), other historical episodes or any fact from everyday life considered relevant. The *ladainha* put forward a more or less explicit message expressing the singer's approach towards life in general, or capoeira in particular. The 'litany' could also comment on the individual players crouching at the 'foot' of the *berimbau* or on any other member of the audience. That is why players were well advised to listen carefully during its execution.

The 'litany' was followed by a *louvação* ('praise', also called *reza*, *canto de entrada* or *chula*), where the chorus always repeats the verse of the lead singer. This song usually starts praising God and one's own master, and ended with warnings or exhortations to play. The two players, who so far respectfully listened, began to gesture to illustrate or underline the message of the *louvação*: for instance raising both hands towards the sky when God was praised.

Only when the solo singer sang a standardized verse such as 'volt a do mun do' ('go the world') and initiated a *corrido* did the players initiate the game proper. The *corrido* also consists in verse(s) of the lead singer followed by the chorus; the difference with the 'praise' is that the refrain does not change, whilst the lead singer is free to improvise his part once he has intoned the initial standard verses.



These three types of song and their sequence are still part and parcel of many contemporary capoeira *rodas* which attempt to keep close to tradition, and precisely for that reason it is difficult to assess to what extent earlier practice departed from this structure. Yet evidence suggests that at least a fourth type of song, a *quadra*, was commonly executed in early twentieth-century Bahian *rodas*. According to Greg Downey, the *quadra* is ‘a type of short solo that is followed by call and response and can be sung during play, unlike the solo *ladainha* which will stop play’.<sup>62</sup> M. Bimba, among others, excelled in *quadras* and has recorded some of them.<sup>63</sup> *Cantigas de sotaque* constituted a further variation of the initial *ladainha* mode. It consisted of two players, instead of one, improvising verses alternately to challenge each other. They usually preceded a game between *mestres* or at least experienced players able to improvise.<sup>64</sup> The *cantigas de sotaque* thus resembled the verbal challenges (*desafios*) common in Northeast Brazilian popular culture.

### *Rituals and the cultural meaning of vadiação*

As Lewis wrote, ‘the introductory *ladainha/chula* complex clearly establishes a ritual framework for the play to follow’.<sup>65</sup> This ritual framework was maintained during the game in a number of ways. Many *corridos* sung during play continued to ask for spiritual protection or referred to a wider religious context. Every *roda* was usually closed by a specific *corrido* (‘Adeus, adeus’), announcing that the players were about to leave, with the protection of God and Our Lady Mary.

The *chamadas* (best translated as ‘calls’) provided an opportunity to interrupt the game momentarily to execute what is perceived, at least today, as one of the core rituals of traditional capoeira. One of the two players initiated a *chamada* by adopting one out of four or five conventional poses, extending for instance the right or both arms wide open while standing in an almost fixed posture (only dancing on the spot or blessing himself); thus ‘calling’ the other. This signalled the interruption of the ‘normal’ game. The ‘called’ player then started a kind of solo performance, executing acrobatic moves, eventually returning to the ‘foot’ of the *berimbau*, and finally approaching the caller with great precaution, to establish some form of physical contact either with his hand(s) or his head (see Figure 4.9). Each *chamada* had to be answered in a particular way, and one of the reasons to call the other player was to test if he was able to provide the adequate answer. Any mistake that left him ‘open’ could result in a kick or head-butt that made him lose face.

Lewis has interpreted the *chamadas* as a kind of ‘subroutine’, or ‘a game within the game’, where the rules of the ordinary game are broken and a new set of sub-rules prevails.<sup>66</sup> Old *mestres* typically insisted that *chamadas* allowed for the full deployment of cunning (*malícia*), considered then—and still now—a key skill in capoeira. The question which however remains is if these rituals only provided a framework for an otherwise non-ritualized mock combat, or if the whole capoeira game can be considered a ritual. Lewis tends to distinguish play and ritual ‘as opposed or complementary social domains’, and sees in the interplay between both the reason for ‘much of the ambiguity in capoeira’. In his view the Catholic rituals of the Bahian festival cycle provided a sacred ‘excuse’ for profane celebrations, among which the games of the capoeira *roda*.<sup>67</sup>

Whilst this might have been the case for some *capoeiras*, especially the ‘tough guys’ examined in the last section of this chapter, I would argue that the distinction between sacred and profane, and between ritual and play is problematic, because it derives from Western perceptions and definitions. Margaret Drewal, for instance, has shown how among the contemporary Yoruba, play and ritual are far from mutually exclusive, and how ritual can consist in permanent improvisation and renegotiation.<sup>68</sup> In similar ways song texts, *toques*, movements and many other features of the Bahian *vadiação* were subjected to permanent re-invention, but could still be part of a ritualized performance.

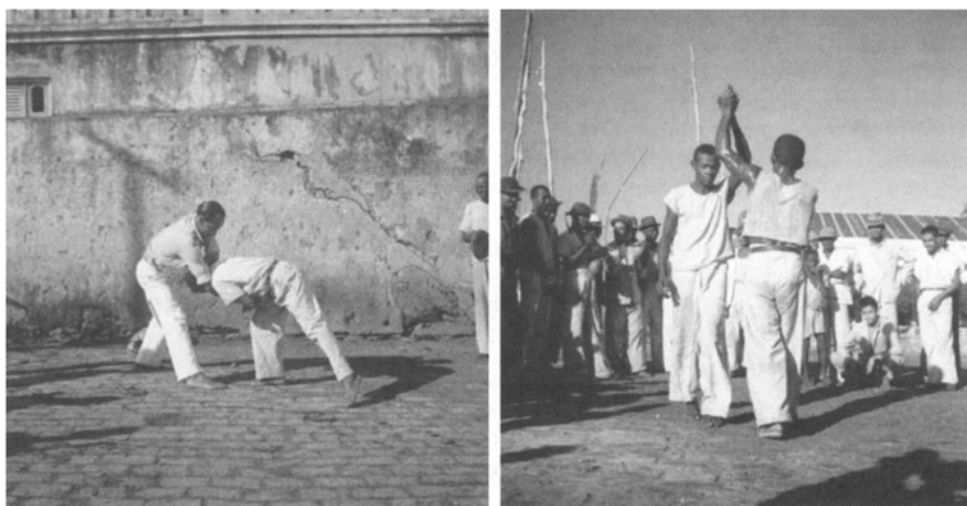


Figure 4.9 *Chamadas*: Mestre Juvenal with a student (left); students of Mestre Juvenal (right) near Mercado Modelo in the port area. Photos by Pierre Verger, 1946–7. By kind permission of the Pierre Verger Foundation.

T.J.Desch-Obi has suggested that the capoeira game as a whole derived from Central African practices. He argues that the ritual circle (*roda*), as well as the cosmograms traced on the ground by capoeira players or their anti-clockwise circling expressed Central African cosmovision, which linked combat to ancestor worship and the ‘crossing of the *kalunga*’ (see [Chapter 2](#)).<sup>69</sup> This is a seductive hypothesis, especially in view of the fact that since Manuel Querino capoeira in Bahia has been associated with the ‘Angolans’. Yet despite recognizing Angolan ancestry, twentieth-century players in Bahia were unaware of that kind of Central African meaning. Earlier practices by Angolans in Brazil may have involved that kind of ritual framework for capoeira, but for the period under consideration here this was, at best, a layer so deeply hidden that it was no longer made explicit under any circumstance. Thus it has never been mentioned by any of the old *mestres* or observers prior to the ‘re-Africanization’ of the 1990s.

What then was the cultural meaning of the *vadição* in its different social contexts? Luis Renato Vieira suggested that the expressions used by the old *mestres* show how they identified with an ethos that was diametrically opposed to the moral values predominant in Bahian society. ‘Vagrancy’ and ‘deception’ did not have a negative meaning for them, but rather helped to construct a ‘second reality’, opposed to the Western notion of rationality and efficiency. In the space of the *roda*, a different, cyclical conception of time prevailed in opposition to the linear time ruling work relations. Each *roda* became a continuation of the previous one, independently of the time span that lay between them. A *capoeira* could ‘keep’ an offensive kick he had received in one *roda* and ‘charge’ only in a later game.<sup>70</sup> Sometimes years would lie between each *roda*. As some old *mestres* teach: ‘the one who gave the kick forgets, but the one who took the kick will always remember’.

If the original religious meanings of African combat games had been lost to a large extent in the *vadição*, what transcendental significance did it have for its practitioners? It is difficult to give an unequivocal answer to this question. Certainly religion provided the basis for the spirituality expressed in capoeira. Yet, as we have seen in [Chapter 2](#), Brazil, and Salvador in particular, was home to several religious traditions and practices. Popular religion consisted of the intertwined worship of a Christian God, Catholic saints,



deities from the emerging nations of *candomblé*, and other magical beliefs and practices. Capoeira was an integral part of this uneasy coexistence and probably also a space where conflicting views could be expressed and integrated in its practice. If Central African beliefs constituted the original framework for what it meant to play capoeira in a *roda*, other religious systems had heavily impacted on the practice, the spirituality, and the cultural meaning of *vadiação*.

The impact of popular Catholicism seems relatively easy to identify through the frequent appeal for protection from saints, the crossing of oneself before play, or the insertion of *rodas* in the Catholic cycle of celebrations. Yet as we have seen in Chapter 2, it remains controversial to what extent the invocation of these saints, or even the use of the cross, already constituted a syncretic practice.

Many capoeira practitioners had strong links with *candomblé* groups, often through the female members of their family. To give just the example of some famous *mestres*, Noronha's second wife, and Canjiquinha's mother were members of *terreiros*.<sup>71</sup> M.Bimba's wife was a 'mother of saints', and in his earlier life he held an office within an Angola *terreiro* (see Chapter 5). M.Caiçara was a *candomblé* priest and, in the later part of his tumultuous life, carved out a living by offering his healing and fortune telling services to the community. No doubt many other capoeira practitioners in early twentieth-century Bahia believed in and actively practised *candomblé*. They, at least, would identify the saints invoked in the capoeira songs with their *orixás*, *voduns* or *inquices*. In the predominant Nagô tradition, for instance, the *corrido* 'Saint Anthony is the protector' would also refer to the *orixá* Ogun, and 'Lady Mary how are you?' with the 'Mother of the Water', Yemanjá. Yet the repression of Afro-Brazilian religions meant that unequivocal references to *candomblé* in capoeira songs were unlikely at the time. One possible exception is the *corrido* 'Capoeira has *dendê*', since the West African palm oil is closely associated to the divine energy (*axé*) and the powers of the messenger Exú.<sup>72</sup>

Formal similarities between *candomblé* and capoeira are easy to establish. For instance, both are based on 'foundations'; and particular moments of the performance are associated with specific *toques*. The function of each of the three *berimbaus* in the capoeira orchestra closely mirrors the use of the three *atabaque* drums in *candomblé* (*rum*, *rumpi* and *lé*), thought to be of predominantly Jeje origin.<sup>73</sup> The music bow itself has also served religious purposes in some African derived slave cultures of the Americas, although no religious use is known in Africa. Afro-Cubans, for instance, played the *burumbumba*, a variant of the *berimbau*, to 'talk to the dead'.<sup>74</sup> Even within Brazil, the *berimbau* has fulfilled religious purposes, albeit rather marginally. For example, one or two *berimbaus* were played alongside drums and other instruments for the worship of the spirits (*encantados*) in the cotton belt of Maranhão.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, the alteration of the state of mind produced by playing capoeira has been linked to *candomblé* trance. Capoeira songs such as the *corrido* 'Help me God, Lord Saint Bento, I will sing my *barravento*' possibly refers to a kind of possession in association with that saint. *Barravento* (under the wind) is a nautical term also used for a 'mild, preliminary trance experienced by initiates [in *candomblé*] before they receive the actual spirit of the deity'.<sup>76</sup>

In the 1930s and 1940s, some authors, based on these and other formal similarities, even described capoeira as a kind of derived form of Afro-Brazilian religion. Carlos Ott explicitly compared the kneeling of *capoeiristas* in front of musicians before the game with the ritual introduction of the daughters of the saints (*filhas de santa*) before the dance and trance in *candomblé*.<sup>77</sup> Cláudio Tavares was struck by the similarity between the initial greetings or salutation (*saudação*) in *candomblé* and capoeira.<sup>78</sup> Edison Carneiro also claimed that capoeira incorporated 'fetishist elements' and explained that in the 1930s, when two players were crouched at the 'foot' of the *berimbau*, singing the *preceito* or *chula*, 'people say that the fighters are praying or waiting for the saint' (expecting spiritual possession by an *orixá*). He furthermore signalled that songs like 'The snake has bitten São Bento' constituted a 'distortion of a chant for the

saint-of-the-snake in the *candomblés de caboclo*'.<sup>79</sup> Most observers did relate capoeira to the more syncretic *candomblés*, which are also often identified as belonging to the 'Angola' nation.

These are, however, comments from outsiders, which do not necessarily reflect the way practitioners of capoeira and Afro-Brazilian religions saw their mutual relationship. *Candomblé* priestesses were often not that keen to have their shrine associated with the *capoeiras*. The anthropologist Ruth Landes was told by one of them: 'Well, they say it's because the men of capoeira do not believe in God. They drink a lot of rum, they are tough customers, sometimes they are lawbreakers—it's another world.'<sup>80</sup> I believe that most 'mother of saints' would have insisted on the fundamental differences between *candomblé* and capoeira, between the cult of the 'saints' (*orixás*) and what was primarily regarded as a recreational activity, a game (*jogo* or *brincadeira*). As M.Cobrinha Verde said: 'Capoeira for those old angoleiros had her magic. Nobody should confuse the magic of capoeira with the magic of *candomblé*.'<sup>81</sup> For that reason it can be more fruitful to look not only at formal similarities with African religions, but rather with African combat games. E.Powe highlighted that Capoeira rituals conform to the requirements of the African martial arts, namely: (1) invocation, (2) transformation, and (3) celebration. Thus the *ladainha*, *chula*, and *corrido* from capoeira equate with each of the three divisions from Hausa combat games.<sup>82</sup>

Links between Catholicism or *candomblé* and capoeira did not exhaust the spiritual aspects pervading the art. Even though many *capoeiras* sought protection from an *orixá*, especially the warrior Ogun or the hunter Oshossi,<sup>83</sup> others requested protection elsewhere. It is very likely that some nineteenth-century *capoeiras* were Muslims. Islamic influence on capoeira are for instance detectable in the use of the term *abadá*—denominating in contemporary capoeira the practitioners' uniform. The term derives from the white tunics which Muslim slaves (*malês*) used during prayers.<sup>84</sup>

When M.Cobrinha Verde, in the quote above, distinguished the magic of capoeira from the magic of *candomblé*, he probably referred to what is known in Brazil as *mandinga*. That term is best translated into English as 'sorcery' and is probably derived from the Mandinka people in West Africa, although there is an alternative etymology.<sup>85</sup> Mandinka slaves were renowned for their knowledge of healing and magical powers during times of slavery. The meaning came to include any practice regarded as 'witchcraft' by the white establishment, and more particularly protective devices, such as prayers or the confection of amulets, usually worn around the neck. These *patuás*, believed to 'close the body', that is, to protect its owner against any bad spells and even against bullets, were very popular among *capoeiras*. 'Closing one's body' used by *candomblé* practitioners and *mandingueiros* (sorcerers) alike, also became paramount in Bahian *vadição*. In addition to spiritual protection it refers to the specific ways practitioners moved, striving to adopt postures that are less likely to expose them to sudden attacks.<sup>86</sup> The use of witchcraft by *capoeiras* also explains why *mandingueiro* became another synonym for the practitioners of the art.

Although *mandinga* predominantly derived from African practices, some symbols of *mandinga* also related to Western esoteric traditions. The five-pointed star of Solomon, for instance, was of common use among slaves in Brazil, and was also frequently employed by free workers, for instance cart-drivers, and *capoeiras*.<sup>87</sup> M.Noronha made extensive use of the star of Solomon, accompanied by the Catholic initials J.M.J. (for Jesus, Mary and Joseph). He carried that *mandinga* symbol in his *patuá*, painted it on the gourd of his music bow, and drew it on the pages of his manuscripts.<sup>88</sup>

The knowledge of strong prayers to 'close the body' was another common practice among Bahian *capoeiras*. M.Cobrinha Verde, 'son' of the *orixás* Nanamburucu and Oxalá, is a famous case in point. During years he used prayers to St Ignace, St Andrew, 'seven capelaries', and 'seven leaves' from a scapulary (*breve*), guarded safely on a virgin plate on his table at home. His teacher in this syncretic, pragmatic way of combining different religious traditions was an African, Uncle Pascoal, from Santo Amaro. Cobrinha Verde relates how he used to go and clean the old man's house on the other side of the river.

Uncle Pascoal rewarded him one day by offering him a protection, that ‘only God could succeed in deceiving [overthrowing] him’. The old African then taught him 65 prayers, including a range of Our Fathers. Among the latter was one dedicated to Antônio Conselheiro, the famous charismatic leader of the Bahian millenarian community Canudos. In other words, *mandinga* for Cobrinha Verde was more about combining and joining spiritual energy rather than preserving one specific African tradition only. In his autobiography he explains another procedure used to maximize his spiritual energy: ‘I was a man that had a family, but I would not sleep with my lady. She slept there and I slept here so as not to break my forces.’<sup>89</sup>

It is therefore inaccurate to assume that in the past *mandinga* had a rigid meaning—in the the meaning shifted significantly over time and has become more secularized. M.João Pequeno sense of one particular religious tradition—just as it is difficult to define it today. No doubt explained that ‘people today do not understand [*mandinga*]; it was prayer, *patuá*’.<sup>90</sup> In its more secularized, contemporary meaning *mandinga* became closer to cunning (*malícia*). M. Curió for instance said: ‘[Mandinga] is that, it’s shrewdness, it’s you being able to kick the adversary and not doing it. It’s you showing that you did not give him a beating because you did not want to.’<sup>91</sup>

In summary, we should not assume that people from different religious backgrounds with different motivations for play assigned a clear, unequivocal meaning to their practice. As is the case today, *capoeiras* did not necessarily and absolutely agree on this point, and they did not need to in order to play with each other. Despite a growing body of traditions—the corpus of songs was increasing with every new epic battle fought by *capoeiras* in the streets of the city and the Recôncavo towns—no definitive agreement existed over the overall purpose of the art, the adequate movements, the level of physical contact and what techniques should be employed in a given context.

Practice was also diverse in respect to clothes worn, instruments and music played, or kicks used. The absence of absolute consistency explains why competing contemporary styles can legitimately refer to style markers such as playing with shirts or in bare torso, barefoot or with shoes, clapping hands or not. These markers are all based in the tradition of capoeira.<sup>92</sup> The *roda* certainly provided a more ritualized space for techniques that could be more lethal when applied in ordinary street fights. Yet under the circumstances of a brawl nobody would listen to a *mestre* and there were no rules other than everything goes.

### Capoeira as a weapon: troublemakers and tough guys

I did not study to be a priest  
Neither to be a doctor  
I did study capoeira  
To beat up the [police] inspector  
(Capoeira song, public domain)<sup>93</sup>

In Brazil, as elsewhere in the Americas, the violence of the conquest was followed by the violence of coerced labour. The brutality of the colonization process resulted in violence being an every day feature of society. To impose discipline on subaltern groups the colonizers resorted again to violence. No wonder reactions against colonial authorities also took violent forms. Some scholars have insisted on the importance of violence in the everyday culture among the free poor.<sup>94</sup> The sheer size of Brazil meant that authorities seldom had the means to enforce order on the entire territory under their jurisdiction. All these circumstances favoured the emergence, in colonial Brazil, of a social type known as tough guy (*valentão*).

The British traveller Henry Koster provided us with an early description of these men in Northeastern Brazil, that also links them to the use of *mandinga* discussed above.

These *valentões* were men of all casts, whose whole business consisted in seeking opportunities of quarrelling; they attended all festivals and fairs, and their desire was to become so famous for courage as to render the knowledge of their presence on these occasions sufficient to keep in awe any other individuals who might wish to create disturbances, considering themselves privileged to revenge their own and their friends' injuries; but they would not allow any quarrel in which they were not concerned. Two roads cross each other at about the distance of one league from Jaguaribe [in Pernambuco], and at this spot [...] some of these men often stood, obliging all passers-by either to fight them or to dismount, take off their hats, and lead their horses whilst they were in sight. These men wore round their necks strings of green beads, which had either come from the coast of Africa, hearing the wonderful property of conveying in safety their possessors through all descriptions of perils, or were charmed by *mandingueiros*, African sorcerers, [...]<sup>95</sup>

Although Koster refers here to a rather rural context on the outskirts of a town, *valentões* were equally present in Brazilian cities. After the breakdown of the Empire, and its centralized bureaucracy, the development of clientelistic networks by local strongmen provided a favourable context for the development of urban 'tough guys'.

How violent was Bahian capoeira then in the period under consideration here? There is no easy answer to this question, since the association of capoeira and violence occurred for a number of reasons and in different contexts. Old *mestres* usually insist that there was no violence in the former *rodas*, or at least much less than in contemporary capoeira. Yet in the first decades of the twentieth century, capoeira appeared in elite dominated public opinion rather in another light. It was then primarily associated with violence and street fights. At least until the 1930s notices on capoeira figure in Bahian newspapers under the rubric crime or disorderly behaviour of young males, inevitably described as tough guys (*valentões*) or troublemakers (*desordeiros*). One could argue that this reflects elite perception of popular culture. Yet the association of violence and capoeira is undeniable in Bahia, even though the musical and playful aspects already described seem to have been more accentuated than in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro.

Even a *mestre* such as João Pequeno, renowned today for his emphasis on rituals, reckons that 'what brought me to capoeira was the desire to be a tough guy'.<sup>96</sup> Many *mestres* from the old guard tell their audiences episodes where their expertise in the art helped them in a violent confrontation in the street, although most usually stress the rather exceptional character of that sort of fight. We therefore need—for the sake of analysis—to establish a basic distinction between violence as a result of playing capoeira and violence arising in other contexts, where capoeira techniques were only used after a conflict had broken out. Furthermore, individual fights ought to be distinguished from more collective forms of violence, such as the neighbourhood brawls referred to by Querino.

From all existing sources it is clear that practitioners resorted to capoeira techniques as a means of self-defence in any situation of danger. For example, in a brief note entitled 'Armed with a machete and a cudgel, they attacked an unhappy porter' a newspaper related the case of a porter who used capoeira to fight off an attacker and eventually took his weapon. But when the assailant hired two *desordeiros* to hit him he could not manage to escape and was left 'bathing in blood'.<sup>97</sup>

The recent work of A.Liberac Pires, based on criminal records, sheds more light on the links between the culture of violence and capoeira in the city of Bahia. The problem is that nobody was arrested in Salvador for practising capoeira—despite the existence of articles 402–403 in the 1890 penal code specifically

banning *capoeiragem*. In contrast with Rio de Janeiro, repression against capoeira was usually limited to the prosecution of ‘disorderly behaviour’ or ‘physical injuries’. Out of 800 criminal records from the period 1900–1930, Liberac selected a sample of 92 files, which he identified as involving *capoeiras*. Even within this specific sample capoeira is rarely mentioned explicitly. What allowed him to establish the link with capoeira was the fact that some of the arrested or injured figure prominently in oral tradition as *capoeiras* (especially in Noronha’s memoirs). Liberac could therefore safely assume that they did use their skills in the event leading to their arrest. Yet the rest were classified as *capoeiras* merely because they were designated in the sources by what Liberac reckons were the standard identifications for *capoeiras*: *valentões*, *capadócios*, *bambas*, *desordeiros*.<sup>98</sup>

One out of the many interesting aspects of his research is the fact that in most cases weapons were involved. Injuries rarely resulted from head butts or other capoeira kicks, but most of the time from knives or machetes (*facões*), and more rarely, cudgels (*cacetes*) or other weapons. Especially jackknives (*navalhas*) figure prominently among the weapons used and are, according to Liberac, another sign of the culture of capoeira in the city. Although the selected cases give a good insight into the culture of manhood or *valentia*, and the motives for fights, a basic doubt remains regarding the links of all of them to capoeira. Undoubtedly many of the arrested were *capoeiras*, some of them well known troublemakers, but others just seem to use weapons in what looks very much an ‘ordinary’ fight, where no specific capoeira technique is involved—at least there is no clear evidence for it. Knife fighting techniques, although commonly practised by *capoeiras*, were not necessarily employed only by them. And conversely, not every *capoeira* was necessarily interested in weapon techniques. Many of the old *mestres* did learn specific aspects of capoeira from different teachers: one taught them the movements, another how to play *berimbau* or other instruments. Knife fighting techniques were often taught by people who were not necessarily involved in the game of capoeira. Cobra Verde learned to throw a jackknife attached to a rubber band (*navalha no cordão*) from a woman called Tonha Rolo do Mar, Boca Rica from a ‘jack-knife player’ called Zabu.<sup>99</sup> The point I want to make here is that tough guys or troublemakers were not always, and necessarily, synonyms for *capoeiras*, although there was an important overlap.<sup>100</sup> By assuming that these terms were strictly synonymous, one risks overestimating the affinity of popular culture with the culture of violence. There are many counterexamples of *capoeiras* which had no reputation for creating disorder such as Toinho da Maré or Samuel Querido de Deus.

Having made this general reservation, one has to concede nonetheless that Liberac has encountered an impressive material on some of the most notorious tough *capoeiras*. One of them is Pedro Mineiro, whose death in 1914 inside a police station is remembered by various capoeira songs.<sup>101</sup> This famous troublemaker was based in the port area and its red light district, and the records suggest he might have been a pimp. He was prosecuted several times either for violence against women or fights with other men over women. This kind of dispute was also at the origin of his violent death. According to M. Noronha, he was the lover of the waitress Maria José. One day she accepted the invitation of a marine to follow him. Pedro Mineiro went after them and killed one marine and threw another one out of a window. He was arrested and detained at the police station. The captain of the marine’s ship nonetheless was not satisfied with his arrest, because the police chief Alvaro Cova was known to protect *capoeiras*.<sup>102</sup> His men therefore invaded the police station to kill Pedro Mineiro. As the *ladainha* goes: ‘Warship Piauí, anchored in the port of Bahia. An insubordinate sailor jumped off to create mayhem. They ordered Pedro Mineiro to be killed inside the police station, comrade!’<sup>103</sup>

The episode of Pedro Mineiro reveals several important facets that help to understand the links between capoeira and violence: the use of its techniques to subject women, the rivalry between different corporate bodies such as the marines and the police, and the practice of clientelism involving *capoeiras*. Behind

individual fights and their immediate motives one grasps a complex web of wider social significance that the records in the archives do not always reveal.

The classification of the neighbourhoods of the arrested and their victims made by Liberac reveals a higher proportion coming from the districts of Santo Antônio and Pilar, where, according to other sources, many *capoeiras* indeed resided. Conflicts were also frequent in the port district of Conceição da Praia, but involved mostly people not resident in that area. This matches with the likeliness of fights occurring during the religious festivals in the waterfront area and suggests that neighbourhood identity played a role in brawls, as already highlighted by Querino. Criminal records and oral history suggest that invasion of what was considered one's own space was responsible for much of capoeira violence. However, if identification with specific districts of the city certainly was an important aspect of capoeira and tough guys' identity, no strong gang culture such as the nineteenth-century *malts* in Rio seem to have developed in Salvador.<sup>104</sup>

The late Mestre Noronha was, in his youth, part of the group he identifies as the troublemakers or the 'tough guys from the era of 1922'. In his memoirs he offers a detailed description of places and people he considered responsible for violence. The capoeira *roda* at the Pilão sem Tampa hill in the district of São Lázaro, for instance, is singled out as 'a place where only *desordeiro* existed who fought the police all the time, and that is why the police hated the *capoeirist*'.<sup>105</sup> When these tough guys from the shanty towns on the hills converged on a *roda*, major street fights were likely to happen, such as the 'Big brawl' (*barulho*) of 1917 at the Curva Grande. On that occasion the police was involved in setting a trap to catch a group of tough guys. When the sergeant of the military police who was in charge of the *roda* pushed his revolver, a *capoeira* took his weapon and generalized fighting took place between *capoeiras* and the police. Soon the place 'looked like a battle field'.<sup>106</sup> Note that the police sergeant was obviously only able to act in that way because he was a full fledged *capoeira* himself, which again shows that *capoeiras* and police were not living in entirely separate worlds. For that reason the issue of capoeira repression is usually more complex than the epic narratives of resistance that present day *capoeiristas* like to tell.

After abolition and during the first half of the twentieth century two main motives for repression of capoeira remained: the eradication of African 'barbarism' and the control of street violence. In the rural areas and the smaller towns of the Recôncavo repression seems not to have been particularly efficient, since police forces were usually very limited. In Salvador, the aim to subdue troublemakers sometimes extended to a more general repression of any capoeira practice. The crucial character in that respect was Pedro Gordilho. There is contradictory information about the different posts he held in the Bahian police up to 1930.<sup>107</sup> The period 1920–1926, when he was 'delegado auxiliar', seems to be of particular importance. He took drastic steps to ensure law and order in the city, using for instance the cavalry to end a student demonstration. As we have seen, he was particularly keen to wipe out Afro-Brazilian traditions. According to oral tradition he also disrupted many capoeira *rodas*. Possibly the rhythm *Cavalaria*, played to warn all participants of the eminent arrival of the police, finish the *roda* and disperse safely, originated at that time. Pedrito, as he was nicknamed, had huge numbers of people arrested in his violent police actions, but I have not been able to track detention records of this period, and it seems that as a rule no trials followed his intemperate actions.<sup>108</sup>

One should however not assume that repression of capoeira was systematic in Salvador throughout the First Republic (1889–1930). Another, probably more frequent pattern consisted in a mixture of selective repression and tolerance. Dr Álvaro Cova, police chief of Salvador from 1912 to 1920, constitutes the best example for this posture. He protected a selected group of troublemakers, using them for his own purposes. He was the godfather of two brothers, Escavino and Ducinha, well known in the city and capoeira circles as tough guys. They served as his electoral assistants (*cabo eleitorais*), responsible for gathering support among the electorate.<sup>109</sup> A. Vianna describes how, in the same period, the police even used some *capoeiras*



to discipline a group of upper-class students who were behaving improperly.<sup>110</sup> At times police tolerance of capoeira could be negotiated and result in stylistic changes. According to Ruth Landes who attended *rodas* in the 1930s, 'dangerous' movements were taken out, as a 'precaution demanded by the police to obviate harm'.<sup>111</sup>

Therefore, just as in Rio, repression against capoeira was often ineffective in Salvador because many of the 'tough' or professional *capoeiras* had a patron to protect them. The godfather would act as a guarantor, or put up bail if necessary to get them out of jail and use his influence to keep them free of trouble. As Licídio Lopes remembered in connection with the annual festival of Rio Vermelho:

There was a great number of tough guys in every neighbourhood: They started rows, distributed blows, finished the festivals with shootings and machetes and nothing happened, they were not arrested, nor feared the police because they were the *capangas* or body guards of the big politicians, mainly in election times [...]<sup>112</sup>

For that reason the capoeira *corrido*: 'Look the man I killed. To prison I will not go'<sup>113</sup> might reflect not only capoeira defiance of the authority, but also express capoeira complicity with the police.

Manuel Henrique Pereira, better known as Besouro Mangangá, is another case that illuminates the contradictory relations of early twentieth-century *capoeiras* with state authorities. The name Besouro evokes one of the most powerful legends in capoeira. He is the hero of some famous episodes, countless versions of which circulate among *capoeiristas*. Interestingly enough, most of them do not take place within a capoeira game or a *roda*.<sup>114</sup> According to all accounts spread via capoeira songs and oral history, Besouro nurtured strong resentments against the police, and liked to humiliate officers whenever he could. In a frequently remembered episode he confronted a whole police force on the Square of the Cross (Largo da Cruz) in his native town of Santo Amaro in the sugar belt. Tales usually emphasize that the police force, although superior in number, were never able to get hold of him for two reasons. First, because he was such a tremendous fighter and second, because he enjoyed protection from a powerful *mandinga*. According to some versions he was able to transform himself into an animal or a plant when he needed to escape ('besouro' means 'beetle'). Others emphasize that Besouro's body was bullet proof thanks to a powerful amulet. Oral history accounts also frequently depict him as a defender of the poor, challenging planters who abused their employees.<sup>115</sup> To what extent those narratives are fictional is difficult to establish. Yet that a *capoeira* acting like a kind of social bandit became so popular is in itself revealing, and likens him to other famous outlaws such as Lampião.

Liberac has recently found some documentary evidence regarding Besouro's existence. A court case was instructed against him in 1918, when he served as a soldier in an Infantry Battalion in Salvador.<sup>116</sup> Following the account of one of his victims, Besouro came to the police station of São Caetano to claim his *berimbau*, which was being kept together with confiscated arms. The police officer refused, only to be insulted by Besouro. When three policemen went outside to arrest him, he drew his sabre and, together with three other soldiers he had brought along with him, assaulted the officers. Local residents, however, reverted the situation by throwing stones at the soldiers. Besouro and his men retreated, but came back later with a troop of 30 soldiers, commanded by a sergeant. At that stage the police chief of the district arrived and got in touch with the commander of the battalion. In the course of the subsequent trial Besouro claimed that he was only trying to arrest the policeman, who was a deserter from his army unit. His defence was to no avail, and he was expelled from the army as a consequence.

There are again many divergent accounts of his death, which supposedly occurred around 1924. One popular version claims that the police officer that killed him had to use a knife made of the palm wood



Tucum, since Besouro's body was resistant to metals. Another explains that his persecutors only got hold of him because they made him sleep with a woman. As a consequence he lost the *mandinga* which protected him, and his body, no longer bullet proof, succumbed to his aggressors. Besouro embodies therefore all the key virtues and qualities of the *valentão*: the defiance of the police authorities, boldness and courage, cleverness (*malícia*) and spiritual protection (*mandinga*). No wonder that a number of old *mestres*, among them Cobrinha Verde and João Pequeno, claimed to be his cousin.<sup>117</sup>

Since playing capoeira entailed a wide range of games, and the passage from friendlier modalities to more confrontational ones, the risk of rule breaking was inherent in the game. Some sources seem to suggest that disagreement between two players could result in serious injuries, especially if weapons were involved:

Machete blow. Yesterday morning, Miguel Ferreira dos Santos and Gregório *de tal* [family name unknown] were entertaining themselves playing capoeira, when Gregório seized a machete and hit Miguel with a deep strike, which reached him at the occipital frontal region. The injured went for care to the Santa Isabel hospital.<sup>118</sup>

Although *mestres* in charge of *rodas* during festivals usually tried to avoid any breaking of rules that would lead to open violence, they were not always successful. Given the large audience watching the game, no *capoeira* wanted to lose face. Festivals also attracted large numbers of players from different neighbourhoods who did not necessarily know each other, therefore misunderstandings and rougher, confrontational games were more likely to happen than in a *roda* among friends and acquaintances in one's own neighbourhood.

The festivals in themselves were prone to the eruption of violence for many reasons. They concentrated thousands of people in a narrow space, many of whom consumed alcohol. In such a context it was easy for a male to feel offended in his honour because some other male stepped on his foot, groped his lady or looked at him in the wrong way. *Desordeiros* attended festivals with the explicit aim of starting some 'confusion'. Mestre Caiçara (see Figure 4.10), probably the last of this kind of troublemaker who enjoyed fighting above all, related one of his rows at a festival as follows:

That was when I fought at the Ribeira [festival on Mondays following the Bonfim celebrations]. It was opposite the old clubhouse of the Itapagipe, and [there was] a citizen who was chief investigator, Juracy Otacílio. He was chief of the theft investigation. He was everywhere, you know, he was chief of a team. He came to me and said:—Caiçara, don't bother us! Don't give us any work! Because I loved to fight, just as a woman likes money! I arrived and there was the capoeira roda and I entered [...] I started to sing, I started to jump, I started to drink, I started to bathe in beer. After a while the owner of the stall [*barraca*] came. He always had some bouncers [*capangas*] with him who were from the police...—I don't want this kind of thing with me! Poor guy...I went and returned the table. And then the fight started. And they started to hit me. And Caiçara over here, and over there, and trying to avoid the blows. I was hitting them and they were hitting me. After a while they got hold of me and arrested me. They took me to the police station on the Papagaio [Square]. After a while my mother came or she went after the late Cosme Faria, who was an MP, he was one of the great lawyers in Bahia.<sup>119</sup>

Mestre Noronha explained the frequent 'disorders' and 'brawls' at the festival of Santa Luzia do Pilar, in the port area, through 'the lack of understanding between the *capoeirista*, *sambista* and *batuqueiro*, and



Figure 4.10 Mestre Caiçara was one of the last capoeira ‘troublemakers’ in Bahia. (Photo by the author, Salvador, 1994.)

other people’. He related the knife and gun injuries to the ‘concentration of troublemakers’ in the area and added a list of port professionals as if that were enough to explain violence.<sup>120</sup> In other words, he took on board the identification of certain categories of workers with the ‘dangerous classes’, and acknowledged the need for police intervention to finish with the troubles. It must be said that Noronha wrote his memoirs in the 1970s, when he recognized, retrospectively, the need for changing the culture of violence. His list of 47 ‘great *mestres*’ that had died by then is noteworthy not only for the names but also for their occupations: almost all of them were manual workers, and most of them worked in the harbour. Ten were porters (*canegadores*), the single most important professional category in the list, followed by five dockers (*estivadores*). Many worked as fishermen or fish traders and the rest in other artisan activities (shoemakers, cart drivers, masons) or were just unskilled bootblacks. Three were electoral agents (*cabo eleitoral*) and only one, Aufeu, was singled out as a professional ‘troublemaker’.<sup>121</sup>

If almost none of the great *mestres* were professional troublemakers, but workers, how could they be *malandros* and tough guys? I would like to suggest that *malandro* and *valentão* were not necessarily synonyms in early twentieth-century Bahia as suggested by most scholars. Whereas the *malandro* distinguished himself by disguising his skills, only displaying them in an emergency, the *valentão* was happy to boast about his toughness. Maybe the song ‘Oh, give me my money, tough guy/On my money nobody lays hands’ reflects precisely the antagonism between a *capoeira* and a *valentão*. Furthermore, the *malandro* typically did not work in a regular occupation, in contrast, as we have seen, to many Bahian *capoeiras*. So how could a worker-*capoeira* be a rogue? First of all, *malandragem* of course could also be used to fool the boss or headman or to deal with the authorities. But maybe *malandragem* also became an ideal, which workers strove to live up to.<sup>122</sup> The *roda* certainly provided them with such a space, not only to relax their tired bodies, but also to escape dominant values by living according to the ideology of idleness. Although a young Bahian *capoeira* was likely to be a *malandro*, or a tough guy, or a worker, he rarely was all three at the same time.

## Conclusion

The *ladainha* 'Brazil said yes, Japan said no', still sung in contemporary *rodas*, invokes the participation of a *capoeira* in World War II, when Brazil sent an expeditionary corps to Italy to fight under US command against Nazi Germany. After the 1940s capoeira in Salvador underwent major changes. Not much is known before the 1860s, when the art started to be mentioned and described in written sources. Therefore we can consider the two international wars Brazil actively participated in, and which are remembered in 'traditional' capoeira songs—the War of Paraguay (1865–1870) and World War II (1941–1945 for Brazil),—to roughly delimit the period where the *vadiação* developed and was consolidated in Bahia.

The *vadiação*, or capoeira in its 'classic' form, emerged through amalgamation and reinvention of African combat games and the integration of elements from the broader colonial and Afro-Bahian popular culture. Unfortunately we still do not know any details of that process prior to the 1860s, or its prehistory—the period for which no written sources seem to exist in Bahia. Yet by the end of the nineteenth century capoeira was still practised by the descendants of the former slaves, now toiling as stevedores, artisans, sailors or fishermen. It remained an almost exclusively male pastime in the city of Bahia and the adjacent Recôncavo during subsequent decades.

The life of these men was shaped by the labour relations of post-emancipation, their integration into their poor neighbourhoods, and their participation in the Bahian festive culture. That popular culture was extremely dynamic. Developments resulted not only from socio-economic transformations, but also came through the confrontations with the elite culture and policies. During post-emancipation the elites waged 'culture wars' against the aspects of subaltern culture considered a hindrance to progress. In particular manifestations identified as 'African' easily became subject of state repression. Yet the subjugation of what elites considered 'barbaric customs' was seldom straightforward and consistent, depending rather on the case and the moment. Thus elite repression of capoeira was occasionally intense and methodical, but at other times rather low profile and unsystematic. The art adapted and survived.

As a result of socioeconomic transformations, demographic change and elite pressures, many African traditions and colonial customs disappeared, or were de-emphasized. African languages, for instance, were no longer heard in the streets of Salvador and no Creole survived. Yet due to the tenacious resistance of many women and men, some traditions of their African and Creole forebears could be preserved and adapted to new environments, such as the cult of the saints, the cuisine or many recreational activities. Given its exposure to elite repression, capoeira crystallized, alongside *candomblé*, as a core marker of black or Afro-Bahian identity, whilst at the same time continuing its expansion among the broader *mestiço* population.

The abolition of slavery resulted in the growth of an urban proletariat, subjected to working conditions influenced by and treatment inherited from the times of bondage. As *candomblé*, capoeira offered a refuge from the constraints enforced by post-emancipation society. The ideology of idleness provided alternative principles for survival, diametrically opposed to the new work ethics advocated by the elites. As such *vadiação* expressed values and behaviour of subaltern classes, its 'hidden transcript' that was usually not known or understood by the whitened middle class and the elites of Bahia.<sup>123</sup> Yet at the same time the ideology of idleness reproduced, albeit inverted, some features of dominant discourse and values. As we have seen in the case of the Cariocan *capoeira*, the *malandro* was not a revolutionary, but tried to accommodate within the system. Just as in Rio de Janeiro, the *malandros* and tough guys from capoeira eventually exchanged their services against protection from the powerful.

If capoeira per se therefore did not really endanger elite domination, its practice provided subaltern men with an important source of physical health and spiritual energy. The practice of capoeira helped them to relax and chill out from heavy work and harsh treatment by superiors. Capoeira offered healing powers and

fulfilled therapeutic functions in a different, and sometimes, complementary way from *candomblé*. As such it also contributed to the reproduction of the labour force. Hence capoeira movements per se were not seen as prejudicial by the elites, but rather the underlying principles of its practice, which undermined work ethics and questioned the monopoly of state violence.

Capoeira was associated with street violence for a wide range of reasons, both in and outside the *roda*. There could be many reasons for the outbreak of violence. Male competition, in particular for women, resulted in insults or what was perceived as an attack on one's honour. Violence also was the result of larger group conflicts, opposing capoeira gangs, political clienteles, or even different corporations, for instance the police against the army or cart-drivers against stevedores. Violence was more likely to occur, however, outside the spiritual space delimited by the *roda*. If we can therefore identify an important connection between a sub-culture of violence and the universe of capoeira, no absolute overlap existed. 'Tough guys' were young, and the most notorious troublemakers constituted only one segment of the capoeira universe, which was also inhabited by overexploited workers rather happy to avoid direct physical confrontation, be it with tough guys or police officers. *Malandragem* also consisted in avoiding conflict unless one was in a clear advantage. Elderly *capoeiras*, on the other hand, typically showed more interest in the ritual aspects of the art. Thus age provided an additional factor for the diversity of style and purposes in capoeira.

The amalgamation of various combat traditions and the different contexts of its use further contributed to the diversity of practice, modalities and ultimately, the meaning of capoeira. Capoeira as a ritual, capoeira as gymnastics, capoeira as a rhythmic game and capoeira as a weapon were not mutually exclusive, and there might have existed some overarching, but relatively vague consensus about what linked all of them. Yet individual emphasis on each modality ultimately diluted the meaning of its divergent practices apart. Since no central authority ruled over its practice, individual styles developed freely even within the capoeira-as-a-game modality. Thus the *vadição* provided Bahian men with a wide range of options. Not every *capoeira* liked to play for money in front of a bar; not every *capoeira* loved fighting more than courting women. The existence of these different modalities of how to play or fight reinforces the point made by Muniz Sodré that there were 'diverse factions of angoleiros in Bahia'.<sup>124</sup> The diversity of individual styles in return expanded the possibilities for innovation by just emphasizing or developing some aspects within this multi-layered and not always coherent tradition.

As the violent confrontations between the 'tough guys' provoked increasing public outrage in the 1910s and 1930s, *mestres* more rooted in the rituals of the art began to realize that reform was needed in order to split both worlds. Most of them agreed that only separation between the different modalities could save the art. And that is precisely what reformers such as Bimba and Pastinha did from the 1930s onwards.



## Mestre Bimba and the development of ‘Regional’ style

### Martial arts and modernity

From the 1930s onwards capoeira underwent major changes, largely due to the actions of some outstanding individuals such as Mestres Bimba and Pastinha. To understand these transformations, which can be subsumed under the label of modernization, they need to be placed in the context not only of Brazil, Afro-Brazilian culture and the Black Atlantic, but also within the wider field of martial arts. Manoel dos Reis Machado, or Mestre Bimba (1900–1974), belongs to a generation of black men and women who projected their art to the foreground of Western culture in the 1920s and 1930s. In Bimba’s particular case, though, the impact of his work on an international scale was delayed by almost half a century.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, some European musicians, such as Antonín Dvořák, drew attention to the potential of African-American music, and cubist artists sought inspiration in African sculptures. But it was only after World War I that African and African-American arts started to be recognized in the West as contributors to modern culture rather than as expressions of ‘primitive’ societies. These developments were obvious in the United States, where the Charleston and Jazz spread not only among African Americans but conquered wider—middle-class and white—audiences, and where the art of the Harlem renaissance linked cosmopolitan and modernist aspects to take pride in the African-American heritage.

In the ‘Old World’, the devastation of World War I had demonstrated to Europeans that civilization and barbarity were not mutually exclusive. After years of deprivation they were craving for vital energy which only ‘primitive’ cultures seemed able to offer. No wonder, then, that African-American music and the outstanding dance performance of Josephine Baker conquered the French public in 1925 with ‘La Revue Nègre’.<sup>1</sup> Since Brazilian elites closely monitored French trends, they did not fail to register the fashion of ‘primitivism’ and the ‘blackening of Paris’. In Brazil itself, the Modernist movement, launched in 1922, put the search for the popular roots of ‘Brazil-ness’ back on the agenda and contributed to a positive reassessment of the African heritage. Even if it is not very likely that Bimba knew much about these developments, they had an indirect impact on his work, because they contributed to ease the re-evaluation of the African heritage in Bahia during the 1930s and beyond.

Yet if Bimba could be seen as a figurehead of an alternative, black modernization in Brazil, he equally belonged to a generation of Brazilians who developed art forms that contributed to make the country a nation. He was the contemporary of the composer Noel Rosa (1910–1937), the writer Mário de Andrade (1893–1945), the painter Candido Portinari (1903–1962), who, among others, all played an important part in the development of art forms perceived as truly Brazilian.

Finally Bimba has to be seen in the context of the emergence of modern sports and more particularly, the systematization of combat arts, in which he ought to be compared with other outstanding inventors of tradition. Many European sports were institutionalized during the second half of the nineteenth century. This was the case for British boxing and the French *savate*, the most prominent among European combat traditions. The Queensberry Rules (1867) established clear regulations, which distanced boxing competitions from the older prize-fighting contests. *Savate* was codified in the 1870s by Joseph Charlemont, who also contributed to the spread of the practice around the world.<sup>2</sup>

These developments were not limited to Europe or the Western world. Most modern styles of oriental martial arts from China, Korea and Japan also developed between 1850 and 1950. They consisted of a systematization and reform of older techniques by one or several prominent masters. In Japan the warrior caste of the samurai had excelled for centuries in the practice of martial arts with and without weapons. Among the combat techniques emphasizing the use of bare hands the *ju-jitsu* (the art of softness or giving way) was particularly widespread; hundreds of schools existed during the Tokugawa period (1600–1868). When the samurai lost their pre-eminence after the Meiji restoration (1868), their martial arts also underwent substantial transformation. If the emphasis had been so far on the practical application of techniques (*jutsu*) by samurai warriors, the modernized forms insisted more on their function as a path (*do*) towards the spiritual achievement of the individual. Thus the *bujutsu* of the samurai evolved into the *budo*, the ensemble of modern Japanese martial arts, among which are *judo*, *aikido* and *karatedo*.<sup>3</sup> *Judo* was created by Jigoro Kano (1860–1938), who merged techniques from different *ju-jitsu* schools and shifted the emphasis from combat to physical education. He opened his first academy in Tokyo in 1882. Inspired by Western rationalism, Dr Kano adopted uniforms for practice, standardized the ranking system and introduced the now famous colour belt system. Modern *karate* was codified in Japan during the 1920s by Gichin Funakoshi (1868–1957) and *aikido* during the 1930s by Morihei Ueshiba (1883–1969). All three martial arts eliminated the most lethal techniques, established rules that sought to avoid injuries, and set up codes of behaviour that intended to help students to attain spiritual goals through regular practice. Practice focused on mortal combat did not disappear altogether, despite the formal outlawing of *ju-jitsu* by the emperor Meiji. Some masters continued to practise *ju-jitsu* surreptitiously or subsumed their techniques into *judo*.<sup>4</sup>

When Japan defeated Tsarist Russia in 1905, the West became seriously interested in Nippon fighting techniques. This fostered the expansion of *ju-jitsu* and *judo*, and later of *karate* and *aikido*, throughout the world. Japanese fighters started to tour the main cities of the Western world to exhibit their art. Prominent among these was Mitsuyo Maeda (1880–1941), a student of Kano who engaged in over 1,000 challenge matches and exhibitions, including a demonstration for US President Theodore Roosevelt, in 1904. The introduction of Japanese fighting techniques in Brazil led to reactions among and responses from *capoeiras*, amateurs of combat sports and the military. Two officers of the Brazilian Army published in 1905 a manual of *Japanese Physical Education*, translated from an English book by H.I. Hancock.<sup>5</sup> A few years later the Brazilian Navy even considered adopting *ju-jitsu* for the training of recruits. That provoked some debate and ironical comments from the nationalist press, which of course favoured the use of *capoeira* instead of imported fighting traditions.<sup>6</sup>

Direct confrontation with *ju-jitsu* or *judo* techniques (the difference is not always clear in the sources) were provided by Japanese champions who came to Brazil. They often issued challenges in the cities they visited for anyone to come and fight with them in a free style contest. One famous fight took place in Rio, in 1909, where a Japanese champion, Sada Miako, was teaching *ju-jitsu*. Ciriaco da Silva, a black docker from the interior town of Campos, took up the challenge. The match was carried out before a considerable audience in a pavilion especially mounted for that occasion on the Avenida Central. There are two versions of how Ciriaco, nicknamed *Macaco*, defeated the *ju-jitsu* champion. According to the most likely one, the



*capoeira* used a *rabo de arraia* which hit his opponent's head. In the second version, he first spit or threw sand in Miako's eyes before hitting him. The latter story puts more emphasis on the deception or cunning of the *capoeira* (*malícia*) and is thus preferred by some narrators.<sup>7</sup> After his victory, Ciriaco was carried in triumph by a group of students along the newly built Central Avenue. A verse (*quadra*) celebrating his achievement was heard on Rio's streets.<sup>8</sup> For the nationalists in search of a Brazilian gymnastics, this outcome confirmed that *capoeira* was superior to any other 'foreign' martial art. Ciriaco was invited to show his dexterity to a group of academics at the Faculty of Medicine, which again led to numerous comments about the superiority of *capoeira* in the press. As Jair Moura underlined, Ciriaco's exploit contributed to the rehabilitation of *capoeira* after the years of heavy repression in the capital.

Despite nationalist claims, *capoeira* was not always as successful when confronting other martial arts in free style contests. When the aforementioned Mitsuyo Maeda, also known as Count Koma, settled in Belém, on the Amazon estuary in the 1910s, he faced Brazilian fighters, especially stevedores from the harbour zone. In one combat the Japanese immediately overthrew a *capoeira* fighter, who had to give up or have his leg broken.<sup>9</sup>

The success of *ju-jitsu* prize fights did not fail to impress Brazilians; the first *ju-jitsu* schools were indeed registered in Belém and in Rio de Janeiro in 1914 and 1927.<sup>10</sup> Soon Brazilians became proficient in the art and entered the ring. One of Maeda's students in Belém was Carlos Gracie, who later developed his own, Brazilian style of *ju-jitsu*. Gracie started to teach in the 1920s in Rio de Janeiro. He was responsible, together with his brothers, for the establishment of the now famous Gracie or Brazilian *ju-jitsu* that has won many international free style competitions in recent decades.

Western forms of wrestling, such as boxing, catch-as-catch-can and the Greco-Roman style also spread throughout the main Brazilian cities, leading to the creation of the first local Federation in Rio, in 1930, and a Brazilian Confederation of Pugilism in 1933.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the expansion of *ju-jitsu* and European wrestling forms contributed to intensify nationalist appeals to 'sportify' *capoeira*, the strongest and most original native martial tradition existing in Brazil. It also favoured reciprocal influences. Maeda for instance is said to have developed his techniques by carefully observing wrestling and boxing and understanding their potential weaknesses.<sup>12</sup> Since free style contests in the ring were open to practitioners of any martial art, it could be an advantage to be proficient in several of them. Many famous athletes of the 1920s thus attempted to combine Western boxing, Greco-Roman wrestling, and *savate* with Eastern martial arts. One should not be surprised that some of them also turned towards *capoeira*. If an 'amateur' such as Ciriaco could defeat a professional *ju-jitsu* champion, the art certainly could be used to achieve victory in the ring.

In that context two individuals made an important contribution towards the modernization of *capoeira* and its re-adaptation to a sports environment. Anibal Burlamaqui had been practising Swedish gymnastics, weight lifting and training on horizontal bars since the age of ten. He states that he learned Greco-Roman wrestling at eighteen, and later trained in boxing with 'some constancy'.<sup>13</sup> As one of his friends wrote in the preface to his pamphlet, he was a 'young *sportsman*, a true athlete'—in short a very different character from the traditional Cariocan *capoeira*. As a nationalist he was, however, deeply committed to transform *capoeira* into the national gymnastics of his native country. For the first time, a notable personality was not simply appealing for the transformation of *capoeira* into the national gymnastics, but was actually devising a concrete method towards that end.<sup>14</sup> As the title of his pamphlet *Ginástica Nacional (Capoeiragem) metodizada e regrada* (1928), suggests, Burlamaqui worked out rules of how *capoeira* matches should be fought in the ring. Most took their inspiration from boxing: short confrontations of three minutes interrupted by two minutes of rest. Athletes were to dress in shorts and shirts like boxers, and wear boxing ankle boots.

Burlamaqui suggested a series of exercises, insisting on the importance of training different types of jumps, how to fall and get up quickly, and how to confuse the opponent through constant movement

(a capoeira technique called *peneirar*). He advocated weight lifting and skipping as complementary exercises, and boxing, fencing, and *ju-jitsu* to increase dexterity and resistance. Given his background, it comes as no surprise that Burlamaqui's overall kinesthetics seem more inspired by Europe than Africa. He recommended, for instance, 'a noble and upright attitude' for the basic posture (which he called, characteristically 'the guard'),<sup>15</sup> quite different from the crouched *ginga* adopted by the *capoeira* Ciríaco.

Burlamaqui's booklet also gave a detailed description of kicks and counter-attacks. The great majority of them were part of the arsenal of Cariocan capoeira of his time. He however included two movements that he claimed to have taken from the martial dance *batuque*. According to him, the *bau* was used in both *batuques* and *sambas* of Northern Brazil. The *rapa* consisted in a kind of sweeping step (*rasteira*), applied to the outside of the heel instead of the inside. He furthermore included three kicks, which he asserted to have invented himself: the *queixada*, the *passo de cegonha* ('stork step') and the *espada* ('sword'). Burlamaqui made an important contribution in various respects. He documented, for the second time, the movements of Cariocan *capoeiragem*. He showed that capoeira movements could, just as any other combat technique, he described and analysed and its repertoire of movements could eventually be increased. And more importantly, he proposed a way of redeeming capoeira from its marginalized position, its association with vagrants and criminals, making it equal to other Western and Eastern combat sports. In other words, he suggested that the way forward was to transform the old *capoeiragem* into a proper sport. The price of his proposal was to completely ignore the Afro-Brazilian roots of the art and the cultural context of its practice. If at that stage, *capoeiragem* in Rio had already lost its close association with music, its practitioners were still bound by rituals described, for instance, by Plácido de Abreu (see [Chapter 3](#)). Burlamaqui does not even mention music or any other ritualized action, deliberately ignoring what might still have survived at the time. Despite his brief acknowledgement of capoeira's slave origins, his proposal completely erased Afro-Brazilian traditions from its practice.

Agenor Moreira Sampaio (1891–1960), better known as Sinhôzinho, provided a another outstanding example of how capoeira could be integrated into physical education or be used in fighting competitions. Son of a military officer and influential politician in Santos, this all-round athlete took up residence in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>16</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s, he taught physical education, gymnastics, athletics, football and combat arts in different clubs of the city.<sup>17</sup> He considered capoeira a valid combat technique, but, as his colleague Burlamaqui, was not interested in ritual or artistic aspects. Sinhôzinho nevertheless was one of the few people who still taught capoeira in Rio de Janeiro, preventing it from disappearing all together. His students emphasize the elaborate tools he invented for training capoeira movements.<sup>18</sup>

It is within this context of enhanced competition and cross-fertilization between different combat traditions that one has to understand the contribution made by Mestre Bimba. His 'Regional Bahian fight' was primarily an answer to these developments, which threatened to relegate capoeira to oblivion or, as was the case with the model proposed by Burlamaqui and Sinhôzinho, to transform it into a mere set of bodily techniques without being imbedded in a tradition on its own.

### Mestre Bimba and capoeira in the ring

Mestre Bimba was born Manoel dos Reis Machado on 23 November 1900 in the modest neighbourhood of Engenho Velho, in Salvador. Both his parents came from the Recôncavo. His father, a famous *batuqueiro*, was born in Feira de Santana, and his mother came from Cachoeira.<sup>19</sup> From the early age of thirteen he worked as a docker in the harbour, and later earned his living as a cart driver and a carpenter.

Bimba was initiated into capoeira at the age of 12 by an African nicknamed Nozinho Bento, also known as Benthinho, a captain working for the Bahian Company of Navigation. Unfortunately little is known about

this man. Some mention his extraordinary dexterity, being able to do a somersault from a tenuous onion box.<sup>20</sup> For a number of years Bimba practised the traditional capoeira or *vadiação*, and his ability as an angoleiro has always been recognized, even by those who later criticized the new style he developed. Bimba claimed to have taught capoeira since 1918 in his neighbourhood, and, according to M.Itapoan, already at this stage gave his group of about 30 male students the ironic name 'Club united in trouble'.<sup>21</sup>

It seems that Bimba grew increasingly unsatisfied with capoeira as it was usually practised at the time. For Bimba, exhibitions during Catholic festivals on public squares put too much emphasis on pantomime, and kicks were not efficient enough to face more serious challengers, especially those trained in the new martial arts coming from abroad. He despised in particular the practice of picking up a banknote with the mouth, thrown into the *roda* by spectators, in the middle of a game. According to his declaration to the press in 1936, 'the capoeira de Angola is only suitable for rhythmic demonstrations and not for fight'. He therefore started to develop a new capoeira style, the famous Regional. At that time he claimed to have subtracted two and added 15 new kicks to the ones commonly used in the existing capoeira of Bahia.<sup>22</sup> In later interviews he gave more details, explaining that he had used movements from *batuque* and *maculêlê* (see Chapter 2), and some other Afro-Brazilian *folguedos*, and furthermore from Greco-Roman wrestling, *ju-jitsu*, *judo* and French *savate*, adding to a total of 52 kicks (*golpes*).<sup>23</sup>

The importance of each contributing art is still a controversial issue. Bimba himself apparently saw no problem in introducing kicks from any other martial art into his Regional, as long as it was effective and done within the basic movement of capoeira, the *ginga* (see Figure 5.1). Initially, as M.Acordeon asserts, Bimba might have done so to 'bring the prestige of foreign arts to capoeira in order to attract more students'.<sup>24</sup> But nationalists and traditionalists did not fail to stigmatize the introduction of movements from European or oriental martial arts as a loss of authenticity and proof of Regional's 'Westernization' (in fact 'Easternization' would be a more appropriate term). In return, some of Bimba's students such as Mestre Itapoan and Jair Moura started to insist more on the paramount contribution of *batuque* and to de-emphasize the input of non-Brazilian movements.<sup>25</sup> Since *batuque* was a 'sister' Afro-Bahian expression, its incorporation into capoeira Regional obviously enjoyed greater legitimacy—within both the nationalist and Afrocentric discourses—than the introduction of 'alien' elements from the 'West' or the 'East'. Itapoan and Jair Moura questioned whether Bimba had any knowledge at all of *ju-jitsu* or *savate* when he developed his style or claimed he only used some of their attacks to teach his students how to defend themselves.<sup>26</sup> André Lacé has demonstrated that those arguments are difficult to maintain, given the contrary evidence, and concludes that they reflect a romanticized view of Regional's history.<sup>27</sup> The *queixada*, introduced by Bimba in his Regional style, corresponds exactly to the movement already described by Burlamaqui, in 1928 (and which the latter claimed to have invented). Burlamaqui's influence on Bimba therefore might have been more important than previously thought. Again, it is clear that the development of Regional was closely linked to the challenge posed to capoeira by other martial traditions rapidly spreading throughout Brazil.

To prove the superiority of his new style, Bimba started to challenge other fighters, whether practitioners of capoeira or of other martial arts. He proposed to confront them in a ring, in accordance with the already established pattern of a match with a judge and a paying audience. Frede Abreu, author of the most thorough study of the 'capoeira in the ring', has identified 13 fights that, with the exception of the first, all took place in Salvador's Parque Odeon between October 1935 and December 1936.<sup>28</sup> The first contest opposed a 'capoeira champion' from Rio and a Bahian *ju-jitsu* student of Gracie. At this stage, Bimba and his students merely demonstrated their art to the public in a preliminary show. After that contest Bimba went to a daily newspaper to defy all *capoeiristas* from Bahia. He mentioned some of the most celebrated fighters by name, hoping that they would take up his challenge. In February 1936, Bimba faced Henrique Bahia, and

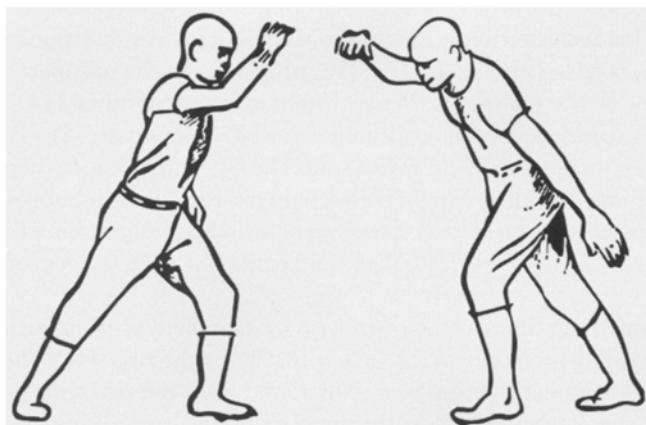


Figure 5.1 *Ginga*, the basic capoeira step as taught by M.Bimba. From M.Bimba, *Curso de Capoeira Regional* (Salvador: RC Discos, 1989).

sent him to the ground with a kick on the chest. The large audience chanted 'Bimba is tough' ('Bimba é bamba') and he was declared 'capoeira champion of Bahia'.<sup>29</sup>

In a subsequent contest, Bimba defeated Zei by points before a sold-out stadium, and thus confirmed his title. This provoked protest from other reputed *capoeiras* such as Samuel de Souza (probably identical with the famous Samuel Querido de Deus), who pointed out that Bimba had not yet confronted some of the most well known Bahian *capoeiras*, such as Maré (Antonio Laurindo das Neves, 1894–1974). Samuel questioned the legitimacy of Bimba's art, since capoeira required the presence of instruments to mark the rhythm. He declared that he was happy to take up Bimba's challenge, 'but only if one condition was met: Capoeira de Angola with *berimbau* and *pandeiro*'.<sup>30</sup>

Bimba replied through the newspapers that 'two *capoeiras*, who try to acquire the champion's ribbon, cannot measure their strength to the sound of the *berimbau* and the *pandeiro*, and this can be seen in more advanced centres [e.g. Rio de Janeiro] where capoeira is gathering more sensational attention'. Contests in the ring, he suggested, should follow the rules established by Burlamaqui in 1928.<sup>31</sup> This last assertion is important because it proves that Bimba was well aware of earlier attempts to 'sportify' capoeira. The struggle over the adequate rules became almost as important as the real fights. When Bimba confronted Vitor H.U. in a subsequent match, the latter abandoned the ring alleging that a blow administered by Bimba (*sopapo galopante*) was not a legitimate movement in capoeira. The following contests therefore operated a clear separation: Bimba's students fought between themselves, and some *angoleiros* confronted each other in the ring, eventually to the sound of *berimbau* and *pandeiro*. Bimba now restrained himself to the role of judge, for instance arbitrating a contest between the *angoleiros* Aberré and Zei.<sup>32</sup>

It seems likely that at this stage Bimba was considering a complete rupture with the traditional capoeira, transforming his Regional into a fighting art for the ring. He called his style Luta Regional Baiana—regional fighting from Bahia, and even referred to it as 'ex-capoeira'.<sup>33</sup> In other words, he was taking the path proposed by Burlamaqui and already practised by a number of Cariocan *capoeiristas*, who reduced capoeira to its offensive or defensive movements, without any ritual or music, and thus severing the art from its African spiritual roots. Probably Bimba was radicalizing his position at that moment to emphasize the difference between his art and traditional capoeira, increasingly identified as 'capoeira de Angola'. By entering the ring, however, Bimba was forced to comply with the rules of wrestling competitions, which

ultimately meant adapting his style to that particular type of contest. Grabbing and wrestling was not part of capoeira fighting tradition, and if capoeira was to be successful against wrestling arts, it would have to incorporate these techniques. Furthermore, cunning, tricks and *malícia* were unlikely to be of great use here, even though Bimba knew they were central to survival in the streets. The option was therefore either to adapt his Regional to the ring and lose the connection with capoeira or to retreat from the ring and find new spaces for his style, where fighting and capoeira rituals could coexist. Fortunately for the survival of capoeira as an independent art, he chose the latter solution. When *ju-jitsu* champions such as Jaime Ferreira provoked Bimba and his students in 1945–1946 by claiming that they did not want to fight, that Regional was 'not worth anything' and could not compete with *ju-jitsu* or freestyle wrestling, Bimba declared that his Regional was not a fight for the ring, but for any situation in real life.<sup>34</sup> Both he and the *angoleiros* thus seemed to retreat from the ring, at least for the time being. That retreat was not absolute, since in 1949 Bimba and his students still participated in a series of matches in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Bimba himself did not enter the ring, but two of his pupils were defeated by *Sinhôzinho's* students.<sup>35</sup>

The defeats in Rio and the circumstances surrounding the match in São Paulo (during which accusations of corruption were raised) might have reinforced Bimba's conviction that his Regional was definitively not suited for this type of contest. Yet the appeal of the ring, where capoeira fighting skills can be measured with other martial arts, remained. Right up to the present day a number of capoeiristas train for other martial arts and try their skills in freestyle contests. Despised by traditionalists, this type of 'ring capoeira' or 'capojutsu' constitutes nonetheless one important trend within the contemporary capoeira universe.

### New movements and teaching methods

When Bimba developed the movements, characteristic teaching methods, rituals and many other features of his style is not entirely clear. Bimba himself made contradictory statements in this respect. In 1953 he claimed to have started the Regional in 1933.<sup>36</sup> Twenty years later, he asserted that he had created the entire Regional as early as 1928.<sup>37</sup> Accounts by his students or other *mestres* often tend to merge aspects from different periods into one homogeneous narrative, disregarding changes, adaptations, and rearrangements. It is even more difficult to assess precisely to what extent Bimba's students influenced this development, since the *mestre* not only adapted his teaching to a new, middle-class and white constituency, but also because some of his best students had an important say in the codification of the style. There is no doubt, however, that Regional was developed as a distinct style in opposition to both the traditional Babian capoeira and other combat sports.

Bimba introduced a range of new, offensive movements into his capoeira. Punches using one or both hands (*godeme*, *telefone*, *galopante*) struck the opponent into the face, and unbalancing techniques (*desequilibrantes*) employed the arms or the upper body to take the opponent to the ground. The *desequilibrantes*, the *ponteira* and the somersault (*salto mortal*) are often said to have originated in *batuque* moves.<sup>38</sup> The front kick *queixada* and the sideward 'hammer kick' (*martelo*) in contrast resemble basic attacks in oriental martial arts. They were executed from a more upright position. All these movements increased the offensive potential of a capoeira player and enhanced his chances in confrontations with traditional *capoeiras* or practitioners of other combat sports.

The acrobatic movements using the 'despised waist' (*cintura desprezada*) constituted a further kinesthetic innovation of the Regional. The aim was to enable the *capoeirista* to react against any attempts to grab him—precisely what practitioners of most other wrestling traditions would attempt to do in a free style contest. These movements (most of them called *balões*, 'balloons') consisted in projections of one *capoeirista*, who had to land as softly as possible on his feet after performing an acrobatic escape where his



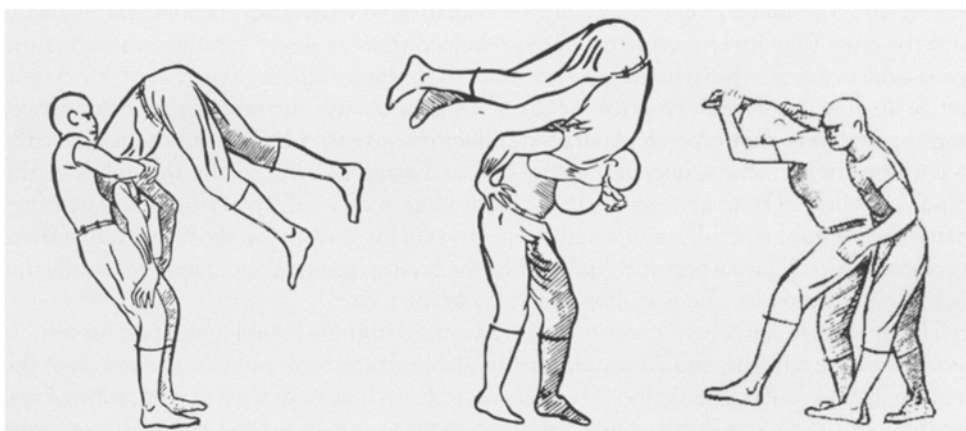


Figure 5.2 Acrobatic movements of capoeira Regional: *balão cinturado* (left), *gravata* (centre) and *açoite* (right). From M.Bimba, *Curso de Capoeira Regional* (Salvador: RC Discos, 1989).

head was initially pointing downwards (see Figure 5.2).<sup>39</sup> The ‘balloons’ soon became the most polemical movements used by Bimba, since in traditional capoeira there usually was no grabbing (but we have seen in Chapter 4 that there were some important exceptions). The acrobatic performances of the *balões* became thus a symbol for the beauty of Regional or, according to the observers’ stance, the ‘adulteration’ of the ‘genuine’ capoeira. The use of punches, new kicks and *balões* in a traditional *roda* could eventually provoke disputes and conflicts. Photographs from the 1940s and film shootings from the 1950s show, however, that some angoleiros practised *balões*, although it is impossible to ascertain whether this was an influence of Bimba or an established previous practice.<sup>40</sup> Yet, the innovations of the Regional went beyond the introduction of new movements. It is nowadays a common place to assert that Regional play is faster than traditional Angola. No doubt Bimba wanted his students to be able to play fast and energetically. This was and is however also the case for many angoleiro teachers. On the other side, Bimba also required his students to train at a slower pace so they could develop their ‘inside’ game, which consists in intertwined movements at close range.

It was rather his teaching method that constituted the crucial innovation. So far capoeira had been mainly taught on the spot, informally. More experienced players—who were, as far as we know, not yet systematically referred to as *mestres*—instructed neophytes at home, on any available open space in the neighbourhood, or in a working context, for instance the port area. Participation in the street *rodas* was a further important moment of the training. Bimba transferred the core of the practice into a closed space, the ‘academy’, where only his students trained.

M.Bimba required anyone wanting to register in his academy to fulfil two criteria: not to be a vagrant (therefore requiring a proof of work or study) and to pass an initial test of physical ability. In the early days of the academy, Bimba expected the prospective student to resist without complaint a neck hold (*gravata*) he administered himself. As Frede Abreu observed, this was an interesting symbolic inversion of the times of slavery, when slaves were punished by having their neck held in the pillories. Now the black *mestre* applied a similar procedure to white students.<sup>41</sup> Later on Bimba just asked the student to perform some basic movements such as a back bend to make sure he had a minimum of flexibility.<sup>42</sup>

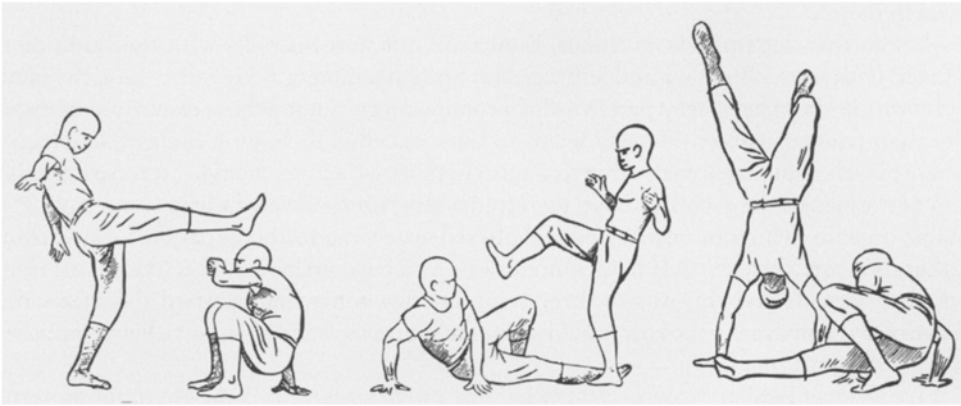


Figure 5.3 Sequences of predetermined movements were one of the major innovations of capoeira Regional (From M.Bimba, *Curso de Capoeira Regional* (Salvador: RC Discos, 1989)).

Beginners were treated with some regard. Advanced students for instance were not allowed to throw them to the ground with a sweeping kick. One reason for this was that Bimba did not want to lose students. Training for more advanced students, however, could be rough. The *mestre* justified this by explaining: 'It is better to get a beating in the academy than in the street'. Rough play approaching real fighting was frequent after class, when students would be queuing up for the only shower in the academy. While waiting, they would engage in ruthless games with each other. Meanwhile Bimba was waiting downstairs to close the academy and would threaten to switch off the light. The expression *esquentar banho* ('warming up for the shower') for rough play in the *roda* derives from this practice.<sup>43</sup>

One key didactic innovation consisted in the introduction of the 'sequences'. Two students performed an established set of attacks and escapes, similar to a *kata* in Japanese martial arts (see Figure 5.3).<sup>44</sup> Bimba taught eight different sequences, which not only familiarized beginners with the basic Regional movements, but also helped them to develop reflexes, interaction, speed, and a sense for the right distance, in short all the basic skills required to enter in a *roda*. Bimba insisted that regular practice of the eight sequences was the best way for beginners to progress, and only allowed students to play in the *roda* once they had shown themselves able to perform them.<sup>45</sup> The sequences of the 'despised waist' developed the flexibility of the spine, and allowed Bimba's students to confront more successfully practitioners from other martial arts. Bimba carefully monitored the progress of his students, dedicating each of them special attention. Once a beginner had learned the basic *ginga* and the sequences—usually this took about six months—he was allowed to play in the *roda*.

The 'specialization course' consisted in an advanced training for graduate students only. It lasted for three months, and during the last month training took place in the woods of the nearby Chapada do Rio Vermelho. The idea was to learn how to survive in a situation of real fighting, and therefore Bimba taught students how to use or defend themselves against different types of weapons, or resist simultaneous attacks from various aggressors. For one exercise, called the ambush (*emboscada*), students had to cross an area and successfully resist the surprise attacks of other students hidden in the bush. This course was so tough that many abandoned it before conclusion.<sup>46</sup>

Luiz Renato Vieira emphasizes that Bimba's didactics were permeated by a new, rationalist 'ethos of efficiency', clearly outlined for instance in the leaflet accompanying the LP *Curso de Capoeira Regional*,



produced by the school in the 1960s: 'We intend to offer you a complete course in personal defense of the highest efficiency'.<sup>47</sup> In opposition to the ethos of idleness, Bimba's students were encouraged to stop smoking and drinking, to restrain from showing off their knowledge outside the *roda*, and even to abstain from talking during classes: 'You are paying for the time you pass in the academy, and watching other fighters, you will learn more'.

### New rituals and a new constituency

As all great *mestres*, Bimba played capoeira music according to a very personal style. He performed and taught his students seven different *toques*: São Bento Grande, Benguela (sometimes spelled Banguela), Cavalaria, Santa Maria, IúZna, Idalina, Amazonas.<sup>48</sup> The rhythms Iúna and Amazonas are usually considered to be of his own invention. It is however possible that the Iúna rhythm already existed in Bahian capoeira and that Bimba only re-dimensioned its function, according it a central role in his style.<sup>49</sup> As already mentioned, in *vadição* no absolute consistency existed among *berimbau* players regarding the number of *toques*, their names and the rhythmic patterns they designed. Bimba, for instance, played São Bento Grande according to a very particular pattern, still today the hallmark of the 'genuine' Regional. Even though his *toques* were distinct from all others *mestres*, they still remained within the range of variation common among traditional capoeira, and one can not really consider that a major rupture with *vadição* took place in this realm.

The Regional orchestra could consist of several *berimbaus* and *pandeiros*, with no absolute consistency over time.<sup>50</sup> After some initial change Bimba seemed to have preferred only one *berimbau* and two *pandeiros*. According to Decânio, this allowed for a 'purer' and 'stronger' rhythm, better suited for the faster Regional style. Bimba has often been accused of 'eliminating' the drum (*atabaque*) from capoeira, and his detractors have interpreted this as evidence for his 'whitening' of the art. As we have seen the *atabaque* was by no means a regular feature of street *rodas* in Bahia.

As a further departure from rituals, Bimba did not start his *rodas* with the traditional 'prayer' (*ladainha*) — 'too slow and lethargic' for his temperament.<sup>51</sup> He rather sang the same lyrics within the faster *quadra* pattern, also a common form among the *vadição* and in wider Brazilian popular culture. He also seems to have excelled in singing *cantigas de sotaque*, where players challenged each other in improvised verses before playing.<sup>52</sup> Yet, during *rodas* and performances he seems to have preferred a repertoire of well-known songs from the public domain, which he rearranged and altered according to the needs of the situation, rather than introduce entirely new compositions which would have set his lyrics apart from other *mestres*. He probably was less keen to invent new songs than worried about how the cadence of the rhythm or the lyrics could stimulate the *capoeirista* and improve his movements and overall performance.

Like all great Bahian capoeira *mestres*, he used a wide range of melodic-rhythmic patterns or *toques* and established a link between these and the specific types of game they accompanied or inspired. Decânio and Muniz Sodré give a detailed description of the type of game accompanying each *toque*. Other students, among them Itapoan and Acordeon, however assert that Bimba only used São Bento Grande, Banguela and Iúna for capoeira games, the other rhythms being merely executed outside the *roda*.<sup>53</sup>

Bimba must have been aware of how ritualization is crucial to identity building. His extraordinary ability to create rituals that build on existing Afro-Bahian customs but also drew from other traditions certainly contributed to his success in creating a new style. In fact few people could be in a better position to create new rituals. Bimba had been exposed to the world of *candomblé* since his childhood. His mother, a descendant of native Brazilians, was member of a *candomblé de caboclo* and devoted to the worship of the Caboclo Cinco Penas. According to the testimony of Bimba's widow given to Muniz Sodré, the *mestre*

himself was a spiritual son of the warrior God Xangô and the *orixá* of the Ocean, Iemanjá. At the age of 20 he was initiated in a *terreiro* of the Ketu nation where he became an *ogã*—an honorific title given to important supporters of a shrine. Even though he subsequently severed links with that particular *teneiro* he still continued to fulfil his obligations for Xangô. Later he was involved in the *terreiro* of his wife, Dona Alice Maria da Cruz near Nordeste de Amaralina. Here he informally held the function of *alabê*, or chief of the orchestra and played the three sacred drums during ceremonies.<sup>54</sup> Yet, Bimba was not only proficient in the Afro-Bahian religious traditions, he was also an outstanding *samba de roda* singer and drummer.<sup>55</sup> Last but not least he had been initiated to the *batuque* movements, music and rituals by his father.

This vast experience gave him the authority to choose from a wide range of elements those that would fit into his capoeira style. He removed some aspects of the traditional capoeira he did not approve of. For instance he banned the money game. Interruptions of the game by one player who 'called' the other through a specific posture (*chamada*) were also not accepted in his *rodas*. But he maintained the *volta do mundo* where the two players momentarily interrupt the game and walk anti-clockwise around the *roda* circle.

Bimba then instituted two important new 'rites de passage' in his Regional style: the 'baptism' and the 'graduation'. The first ceremony occurred when a new student played for the first time in the *roda* (usually after a period of six months). Typically a whole group of new students were baptized together. On that occasion, Mestre Bimba himself played the São Bento Grande rhythm and determined which advanced student was to play with the 'fresher' (*calouro*), forcing the latter to display his knowledge of basic attacks and defences. After the game, Bimba attributed a war name he had invented himself, or which had been suggested by an advanced student, to the novice standing in the middle of the *roda*, followed by general applause. Sometimes Bimba then asked the fresher to take the benediction of his 'godfather', and when the novice extended his hand towards the graduate student who had just baptized him, the latter took the opportunity to apply a kick that threw the freshly baptized on the ground.<sup>56</sup> The graduation ceremony and especially the *lúna* rhythm constantly reaffirmed the separation between the universe of the beginners and the graduated students and more generally contributed towards the instauration of hierarchy.<sup>57</sup> According to Decânio, a strong bond developed between the 'godfather' and the student he baptized. The 'godfather' for instance was allowed to apply the first sweeping kick (*rasteira*) in the *roda*, which would again take the newly baptized student to the ground. These rituals consolidated the group identity and contributed to the perception of Bimba's students as a closely-knit team.

After a further training period of approximately six months, during which the baptized student had to acquire the basic skills of how to play in a *roda*, he would 'graduate'. For that occasion M. Bimba created a second, more complex ceremony (*formatura*), usually graduating a cohort of half a dozen of his students. On that day, people from all over the city and many more from the *mestre's* popular neighbourhood Nordeste de Amaralina attended. Bimba dressed all in white used his whistle to command the ceremony. After some initial games to create the right atmosphere, Bimba stopped the *roda* and asked for the designed orator—one of the older students—to deliver his graduation address, giving a brief sketch of the Regional style and explaining the ceremony to the audience. The graduating students then had their war names confirmed and received, through the hands of their 'godmother' (usually their girlfriend or mother) a blue silk scarf and a medal, to be worn on the chest. Bimba himself also made interventions, advising students how to behave or explaining for example that the silk scarf was formerly used by the *capoeiras* because it supposedly resisted razor cuts.<sup>58</sup> At this stage the graduating students had to pass the final assessment of their technical skills. First they had to perform specific movements which Bimba had requested in front of the audience. If they failed to remember or to complete a movement adequately, or if they arrived late at the ceremony, they had to pay a fine. Then they had to show their knowledge of different types of games, such as the elegant *jogo de floreio*, where they were not supposed to stain their white clothes, and the *escrete*, a

choreographed game including the acrobatic *balões*. The final and most difficult test consisted in playing with an advanced student, who tried to take the medal from the graduand's chest with his kicks. If he succeeded, the student was not allowed to graduate (this allegedly happened only twice).<sup>59</sup> The graduate students were now allowed to play in any Regional *roda* to the Iúna rhythm, but also exposed advanced students to hard play.

The money collected through the fines was used to pay for the drinks consumed by the advanced students. Bimba did not permit consumption of strong liquors and only allowed beer or *mulher barbada* (a special drink whose recipe only the *mestre* knew) once the examination and the *roda* were over. Students and audience then consumed Bahian food, and all participants, women included, could enjoy themselves in a *samba de roda*. The graduation party also included a *samba duro*.<sup>60</sup>

Group identity was further reinforced through the adoption of uniforms. Early types were clearly modelled on jerseys used in other sports. In subsequent years the uniform reproduced the style of port workers' clothes, the *abadá*—collarless shirts and trousers ending just below the knees. Bimba adopted white *abadás*, the colour of the traditional Sunday outfit in which adepts played capoeira during religious festivals. White is also the colour of the supreme *orixã* Oxalá worshipped during the Bomfim celebrations in January (see Chapter 4). The emblem of the school—the Solomon star with an R inside, topped by a cross—was sewn onto the shirt.<sup>61</sup>

Maybe the most important innovation introduced by Mestre Bimba was that he taught his art to a much wider audience, and thereby contributed to the spreading of capoeira to other social groups. This expansion without doubt facilitated the decriminalization of the art. According to the testimony of M. Decânio, it all started when Cisanando Lima came from Ceará to study at the medical faculty in Salvador. Cisanando had already practised weight-lifting since adolescence and learned *ju-jitsu* from a Japanese teacher. In other words, he was already an accomplished sportsman when he discovered capoeira in Salvador. An assiduous spectator at the different *rodas*, he was most impressed by Bimba's style and technique. He eventually convinced Bimba to teach him, successfully passing the famous entry test, and thus became his first white, middle-class student in the early 1930s.<sup>62</sup> Soon other students showed up at Bimba's academy, among which many future doctors, such as Angelo Decânio. Ever since the *mestre* registered significant numbers of students from a middle-class or even an elite background, among them a governor, a judge from the Court of Appeal, scientists, doctors and many other academics.<sup>63</sup>

Bimba and his 'academy', the Centro de Cultura Física Regional, or CCFR, became increasingly well-known in the city of Salvador. His academy moved several times, from the Roça do Lobo during the 1940s to a central location near Pelourinho Square in the 1960s. He established friendships with a number of intellectuals, among whom the US anthropologist Donald Pierson.<sup>64</sup> Through his teaching capoeira practice spread among the middle classes, most of which considered themselves 'white', and even to the elite of Salvador (see Figure 5.4). His contacts eventually led to the decriminalization of capoeira, at least as long as it was practised in academies. Through his friendship with students from Ceará such as Cisanando Lima a channel of communication was even opened to the highest authority in the state. Juracy Magalhães, the interventor (title given to the governor nominated by the central government after the Revolution of 1930) in Bahia, also came from Ceará. He invited Bimba into the governor's palace for a private demonstration of his Regional, somewhere around 1936.<sup>65</sup> One episode often told in relation to that event is that on receiving the request to go to the palace Bimba was afraid of being arrested, since capoeira still was illegal at the time.<sup>66</sup> Luiz Renato Vieira, among others, has cast doubt on that story, claiming that at this stage Bimba knew perfectly well that he had nothing to fear.<sup>67</sup> Reality or invention to dramatize the difficult path towards social recognition, the fact remains that this demonstration in the palace was one of the first times when capoeira was performed in a totally different social context.



Figure 5.4 Mestre Bimba with two friends, the scientist Nelson de Souza Oliveira and Newton Sales. Courtesy of Jair Moura.

Decriminalization came soon in the form of a certificate that a teaching inspector issued on 9 July 1937 to Mestre Bimba, acknowledging him as a teacher of physical education and registering his academy in the Tororó neighbourhood with the Bahian Department of Education, Health and Social Security.<sup>68</sup> This date is often interpreted as the official legalization of capoeira, which was not entirely the case, since street capoeira still continued to be illegal. It was, however, an important step in that direction. The exhibition for the state governor, which had contributed to the institutionalization of capoeira on a regional scale, was later replicated on a national level. On 23 July 1953, Bimba met Getúlio Vargas, the former President (1930–1937), dictator (1937–1945) and then democratically re-elected President (1951–1954). Vargas allegedly said on that occasion that ‘capoeira is the only truly national sport’.<sup>69</sup> The nationalist discourse on capoeira had finally made it to the very top.

These links with the powerful have often been used as evidence for Bimba’s ‘treacherous’ attitude, the forgetting of his class origins, and his deliberate whitening of the art. Defenders, in contrast, emphasize his astute tactics in making alliances with the powerful in order to guarantee the survival of capoeira and avoiding trouble with the police for himself. In that context it is helpful to remember that Bimba—as so many other famous *capoeiras*—did have some personal experience in confronting the police during this youth. He must have been an exceptional fighter and also tough enough not to fear confrontations with the police, since he took pride in having been arrested for the twenty-fourth time on the day of his twentieth birthday, the reason always being for fighting.<sup>70</sup> In August 1936—when Bimba was in his thirties—a newspaper still reported under the headline ‘It’s not easy to catch a *capoeirista*. He defended himself using *cabeçadas* and *rabo de arraias*’:

The well known [sic] capoeirista Mestre Bimba brought to our awareness the violence of which he was a victim yesterday at 10:40 a.m. on the hill of Vila America in the Engenho Velho. Mestre Bimba said that a group of policemen, under the command of Lúcio de Tal, better known as Barra Preta from the Motor Pool, was causing turmoil in the aforementioned place, and without reason grabbed a young boy. Mestre Bimba became involved when he tried to take the boy away from the policeman's hands and only missed being wounded by bayonet because he used his capoeira technique to avoid it.<sup>71</sup>

Another important performance in a new context was the inclusion of Bimba's group into the programme of independence celebrations during the night of 1 July 1936 on the Municipal Square. (On 2 July 1823 Bahia adhered to Brazilian independence, and this festival serves as a strong marker of regional identity.) Although this performance at an official celebration was disapproved by the conservative press, it was another clear sign that Bimba persuaded newspaper reports on capoeira to move from the pages dedicated to crime to those dedicated to social events and sports.<sup>72</sup>

Less publicized, but perhaps more important in the long term was the attraction Bimba's style had within the Brazilian military. In 1938, he started teaching at the Training Centre for Army Officers in Reserve (Centro de Preparação de Oficiais de Reserva—CPOR) at the Barbalho fort in Salvador (see [Figure 5.5](#)).<sup>73</sup> During two years he administered capoeira lessons there, again an important innovation. The military and the military police seemed impressed by the efficiency of his style, the training methods and some special features such as the 'ambush' (*emboscada*), which resembled anti-guerilla training. From that moment onwards capoeira was to experience a lasting success in the barracks, but also growing intervention from officers, who sought to impose their views on how capoeira should be practised.

Although Bimba taught students from middle- or upper-class background, he never abandoned—as many critics suggested—teaching the lower classes as well. He counted fishermen, masons and blacksmiths among his students.

According to Acordeon, some of his poorer students did not even pay for training.<sup>74</sup> Bimba apparently used to call these students his 'folk from the backwoods' ('pessoal do mato').<sup>75</sup> As a matter of fact, capoeira Regional did not only spread to middle-class audiences in the city, but acquired a solid lower-class basis as well. As his academy moved around Salvador, the number of students from all social backgrounds increased.

As diverse as its social basis was the political obedience of his students. 'During the 1940s many anti-fascist intellectuals frequented the academy, like, for instance, Ramagem Badaró, journalist, proprietor and director of the journal *Magazine das Américas*. He was a friend and a student of Bimba.'<sup>76</sup> After the end of the Estado Novo dictatorship the Left made significant inroads into the black working classes, some of which were Bimba's students. In 1946, during its brief period of legality, the PCB included capoeira among its celebrations for the twenty-fourth anniversary of the party.<sup>77</sup>

Jair Moura, son of lawyer, PCB leader and deputy Jaime Alves Moura, trained with Bimba during the 1950s. According to his testimony, 'in 1960, I was commissioned by the PCB to restructure its cell in Northeastern Amaralina (Bimba's neighbourhood). Some of the working-class elements there were Bimba's students.' When the Campaign for the legalization of the Communist Party took off, in 1963, Moura arranged a meeting in Bimba's academy to collect signatures for the legalization of the party:

I invited Fernando Santana, Aristeu Nogueira (First Secretary of the Party's Regional Committee), Mário Alves and even Carlos Marighela [later famous Maoist dissident and urban guerilla leader]. Bimba was not a militant, but he was a sympathizer. He liked [Brazilian Communist leader and



Figure 5.5 M.Bimba teaching soldier Zulfredo, Forte do Barbalho, c.1938. Courtesy of Jair Moura.

former rebel officer] Prestes and 'Návio negreiro' [Slave ship, a famous Abolitionist poem] by Castro Alves.<sup>78</sup>

According to another student's statement, Bimba, having sought advice, revoked the authorization for PCB activities to take place in his academy, his 'only party being the Regional.'<sup>79</sup> If party politics therefore had, with the exception related above, no direct interference with the development of Bimba's group, the broader political and ideological climate of the period, characterized by the confrontation between communists and fascists, also shaped the language and the imagery which represented the emerging Regional style. In this respect, it is very difficult to assess the influence particular students had on the choice of the symbols adopted by Regional.

The emblem of the academy, a 'Star of Solomon' with an R inside, topped by a cross, can be seen as paradigmatic for the amalgamation and the re-invention of different esoteric traditions. As we have seen in Chapter 4, that star was a common symbol among slaves and the free lower classes. The *mestre* himself displayed the symbol of Solomon on a metal ring he used on a finger of his left hand.<sup>80</sup> Yet why and how the symbol of Regional was adopted is still not quite clear. According to Muniz Sodré the two intertwined triangles symbolize the equilibrium required for capoeira practice.<sup>81</sup> More ambiguous even was the choice of the Regional greeting. Bimba apparently favoured 'Axe' [Divine energy in *candomblé*], which was more in line with his Afro-Bahian heritage. Some of his right-wing students however suggested 'Salve', a salute whose gesture and neo-Latin etymology clearly reveal its fascist inspiration.<sup>82</sup> The 'Salve' was finally adopted and is still widely used in contemporary capoeira academies.

It seems therefore that Bimba carefully listened to the advice given by his senior students, and eventually adopted their suggestions. No doubt this contributed to the success of his style. Rego, for instance notes that only Bimba's school had, in the 1960s, written rules and recommendations, displayed on the walls of his



academy.<sup>83</sup> The influence of middle-class students on his teaching methods and the organization of his academy are therefore undeniable. The question remains to what extent that also opened the door to the 'adulteration' of Bimba's original intentions?

Bimba's apparent success in promoting capoeira and his Regional style (in whatever order) was not always well received by his fellow capoeira *mestres*. The history of his relation with the wider angoleiro community is rather complicated. Apparently Bimba tried to convince other capoeira *mestres* to adopt his innovations. He even held a meeting which famous angoleiros such as Pastinha and Waldemar attended. But they declined his offer, preferring to stick to traditional capoeira.<sup>84</sup>

Some *mestres* became envious of his success, feeling that he was betraying the genuine capoeira in order to promote his own career. Some eventually challenged him to fight it out in a *roda*. One of these epic fights involved Antonio Conceição Moraes, better known as Caiçara (1923–1997), a *valençã* famous for his brawls in the red-light district of Salvador. When Caiçara's football team Vasco became champion in 1952, he felt confident enough to invade Bimba's academy:

In this period he did not teach workers, he was only teaching upper class kids. That was when I hallucinated myself [sic], I went from here...I invaded his academy on a Sunday of a formation [ceremony]. I was very bold, I did not measure distance then.' [Bimba's son Crispim opened the door.] 'I said: Who is the owner of this academy? He said: It is my father, Bimba. I said: Tell him I want to make a demonstration here. Bimba asked me: you are *capoeirista*? I said: My *mestre* taught me a little bit. I took the *berimbau* and I sang: They told my wife that a *capoeira* had defeated me...[A challenge song (*cantiga de sotaque*). Caiçara then started to play with Bimba]. He went down over there, and he made it easy for me so I gave him two kicks in the middle of his students, and I received two in return. He then passed his hand over his head and I did not understand. He ordered the *toque* to be altered, the [new] *toque* was Cavalarice, that is, street fight; I made it easy, and he placed his foot and broke my mouth, I do not deny it, to anybody.<sup>85</sup>

Yet despite animosities and rivalries, most angoleiros of Bimba's generation held great respect for him, acknowledging his fighting skills and his didactics. They often overestimated his financial situation or his connections with the powerful. It is true that Bimba and his group toured around the most important cities of Southeast Brazil during the 1950s and 1960s, and earned widespread public recognition. He also made shows in Salvador. Yet Bimba was never very good at administering his income. Official recognition also never went beyond occasional invitations to perform in return for a usually modest remuneration. Bimba often complained that he did not receive regular support from the state. For that reason he decided in 1973 to accept an invitation by one of his students to move to Goiânia, to teach capoeira. His experience there was however far below his expectations, and he died, disappointed and poor, from a stroke in 1974.<sup>86</sup> In 1978 his remains were transferred to Salvador, and only during the 1990s did Bimba receive further official recognition. A square with his name and image was inaugurated in Amaralina, and in 1996 the Federal University of Bahia conceded him a posthumous PhD honoris causa.

### The meaning of Regional style

Since its very inception Regional and its founder provoked passionate debate. Some praised Bimba's achievement to the point of considering him more important than any other capoeira *mestre* past or present. Others, on the contrary, denounced his innovations as 'adulteration' of the genuine capoeira. Prominent among these early critics was Edison Carneiro, who asserted emphatically that 'the popular, folkloric



capoeira, the heritage of Angola, has nothing to do with Bimba's'. Later Jorge Amado, the most celebrated Bahian writer, invoked the testimony of ten renowned *capoeiristas* to conclude that 'Regional does not deserve respect and is a distortion (*deturpação*) of the old capoeira "angola", the only genuine one'.<sup>87</sup> As Greg Downey observed,

The same romanticism that inspired many elites to embrace capoeira as 'folklore', an authentic expression of the Brazilian national genius, also produced in them an extreme cultural conservatism that led to condemnations of any alterations in 'folk' practice.<sup>88</sup>

The press was, in general terms, more supportive of Bimba and often praised his innovations or the performance of his group on all kinds of occasions. The reaction of the other *angoleiros* was rather ambivalent (and will be looked at further in [Chapter 6](#)). A number of wider ranging attempts of interpretation, which went beyond simple condemnation or bitter polemics, have been made since the 1970s. André Lacé started to demand attention towards what he regarded as a 'whitening' of capoeira in newspaper articles although he rather meant the contemporary practice that grew out of Regional than Bimba's style.<sup>89</sup> Alejandro Frigerio uses this concept again in his analysis of the changes occurring in modern capoeira. Inspired by Renato Ortiz' interpretation of *umbanda* religion as a 'whitened', middle-class adaptation of Afro-Cariocan *macumba*,<sup>90</sup> Frigerio judges the incorporation of elements from other martial arts, the spread of the practice to the middle classes, its 'sportivization', growing bureaucratization, and the ideological and political co-optation as corresponding to a similar 'whitening' of an originally black art form. Although he takes care to differentiate between Bimba's style and later developments within the Regional, his analysis tends to take at face value the *angoleiro* discourse about Bimba, his students and Regional style.<sup>91</sup>

Even though categorizations such as white, bourgeois or Western are still very popular among practitioners of Angola style and capoeira scholars to classify Bimba's style or later developments, they often lack analytical depth, because they operate with simplistic and ahistorical dichotomies. The problem with reified conceptions of African and black, white and Western is that their meaning was and is an object of constant renegotiation. Concrete postures, behaviour, customs, and symbols are seldom easily identifiable with one of these poles. The same aspects can and are interpreted, according to the perspective, in diametrically opposed ways, as either white or African, Western or traditional. For example, Bimba's habitual use of a whistle for training or during graduation ceremonies can be seen as the introduction of a Westernised, military routine, but equally as a typical Afro-Brazilian procedure, since they were also used in samba schools. In fact, European whistles were in use in Africa already at the time of the slave trade. Bimba's custom of asking students to pay a fine for being late to a ceremony can be interpreted as the imposition of a new, capitalist ethos; but as Liberac Pires underlined, it was also the implementation of a rule from *candomblé*.<sup>92</sup> It is thus important to be aware of the plural meanings of specific aspects of Bimba's innovations and always integrate them into a wider picture.

Adopting a Weberian perspective, Luis Renato Vieira interpreted the Regional style as an aspect of the cultural modernization in Brazil. Bimba's re-codification of rituals, symbols and gestures and his didactics represent the introduction of a new 'ethos of efficiency' in capoeira, fundamentally different from the previous ethos of 'vagrancy'. Vieira also underlined the affinity of objectives between Bimba and the interests of the dominant social groups and asserted that Regional 'reflects the penetration of militaristic principles of the Estado Novo [the Vargas dictatorship, 1937–1945] into Brazilian civil society'.<sup>93</sup>

Leticia Reis, although accepting Vieira's modernization paradigm, criticized his view of Regional as an entirely conformist project, because it does not allow one to grasp 'the complexity and the cultural dynamics of the capoeira world'. She showed that Regional 'resists when it is conforming' and keeps

'elements which reaffirm the ethnic identity in songs, *berimbau* toques and the very movements'. In her view Regional established a mediation between two different value systems—the Afro-Brazilian and the dominant white—creating an ambivalent symbolic field.<sup>94</sup> She therefore insists that Regional represents an alternative, black modernization.

Since capoeira is a complex manifestation, a holistic art involving very different dimensions, the assessment of the extension and meaning of the changes introduced by Bimba is particularly difficult. Interpretations usually privilege some of the multiple dimensions of the art. It might therefore help to identify first the 'ruptures' Regional introduced in different domains in order to reach an overall conclusion.

Bimba's music clearly ranged within the Afro-Bahian tradition, even if this was not the case for some of his students or alleged followers (as we are going to examine in [Chapter 7](#)). The common accusation that he eliminated the *atabaque* drum from capoeira is not borne out by evidence, which shows that drums were not commonly used in Bahian capoeira at his time. Bimba in fact was rather fond of playing *atabaque*, but within his religious tradition, the *candomblé*.

The importance which he accorded to songs and rhythms attest to his respect for that dimension of capoeira. What is more, the particular *toques* he promoted stimulated the type of games he wanted his students to develop. This reinforced the traditional pattern of intimate relationship between music and game.

The introduction of new kicks or defences *per se* can hardly be condemned as not 'African', as long as they were integrated into an overall practice that retained its original meaning. In other words, unless new movements disrupt the fundamental flow of the game, they can be considered as an innovation within the tradition. However, the introduction of grabbing moves implemented a change of the game in so far as it prevents certain types of 'inner game' to develop.

Bimba taught a more direct, confrontational style than many other famous capoeira *mestres* of his generation. To interpret this as 'white', less 'African', and so on, seems to adhere to a rather stereotyped and simplistic view of what these terms mean. As we have seen, tough guys were a regular feature of Bahian *vadição* or Cariocan *capoeiragem*, and even Bimba's most violent students were certainly no worse than a Pedro Mineiro or Besouro Mangangá.<sup>95</sup> This can be seen as constituting various modalities within a broader Afro-Brazilian or even African tradition, just as different *candomblé* 'nations' existed along side each other, without necessarily one being more 'traditional' than the other.<sup>96</sup>

A more serious challenge is the common observation that Regional students play more upright, in contrast to the crouched style of (contemporary) *angoleiros*. It has to be said, however, that some famous *angoleiros* (such as Canjiquina and Cobra Verde) equally made wide use of upright positions. Nevertheless a shift in emphasis is undeniable between the lower centre of gravity of most African ways of dancing and moving, and the emphasis on stretching and upright positions in modern Western gymnastics. Yet Bimba probably did not move like any of his students. According to the informants interviewed by Greg Downey, Bimba rather moved like an *angoleiro* such as João Grande!<sup>97</sup> In other words, it was rather the teaching of his style to new audiences that led to a major kinaesthetic change.

Bimba's teaching methods certainly represented a major departure from traditional capoeira. Despite the attempt by some scholars to present the 'sequence' as 'grounded in the customs of African knowledge',<sup>98</sup> it does seem difficult not to view them as a modernization inspired by Western gymnastics and Eastern martial arts. The 'sequences', for instance, were rehearsed without rhythm or music, and no longer encapsulated any ludic element.<sup>99</sup> They also paved the way for the standardization of movements, and the transformation of capoeira into a mass culture.

A now common opinion is that Bimba reflected 'the military spirit which spread through Brazilian society at the time of the development of capoeira Regional.'<sup>100</sup> Bimba's overall insistence on an ascetic

lifestyle, the imposition of fines on students and other disciplinary measures were intended to impose new patterns of behaviour, which contrasted with the ideal of 'vagrancy' so common among earlier *capoeiras*.<sup>101</sup> Discipline was supposed to maximize the performance of his students. Given that at the same time the military and the State attempted to instil a different pattern of behaviour among the lower classes, reputedly 'indolent' and 'uncontrolled', there undoubtedly was a partial convergence of objectives with Bimba's teaching. That made Regional so attractive for various groups who dreamed of a 'stronger' Brazil. Hence they tried to appropriate and co-opt capoeira after 1938. This does not mean that the style developed by Bimba was inherently militaristic. In fact most teachers of other martial arts, in particular those from Japan, also advocated similar ascetism.

The introduction of a formalized hierarchy among students, their separation into beginners, graduates and advanced, represented another aspect of the modernization of capoeira. This was not necessarily a Westernization, since again hierarchy is also paramount in the Eastern martial arts, which were introduced to Brazil. A further crucial change that Bimba's Regional introduced in capoeira practice was the shift of emphasis from the *roda* to instruction. Whereas the *roda* represented the main activity in the older *vadição*, in modernized capoeira training became the overall aim. This corresponded to the shift of emphasis towards the path (*do*) which occurred during the modernization of Japanese martial arts.

The crucial difference between Regional and the military-style gymnastics consisted in the aspects called 'folklore' in the LP recording Bimba made to support and publicize his teaching. This record juxtaposed the ascetic rules of his school, the precise instruction in the eight training 'sequences' and the songs and *toques* played in the *roda*, providing thus a bridge between the Afro-Brazilian past and what was becoming a modern sport.

The suppression of some rituals such as the *chamadas* has been—correctly in my opinion—interpreted as a loss of tradition. It seems undeniable that Bimba simplified the rituals of the game where he thought they were not adequate for his purpose. Yet on the other side, Bimba did integrate some new elements that originated from his deep immersion into Afro-Bahian culture. He maintained, for instance, the practice of *samba de roda* as a complement to the *rodas*. More significant, however, was the creation of the new rituals which became hallmarks of Regional style. The 'graduation' (*formatura*) was at least partly inspired by the model of university graduations in Brazil, with all the formality of academic discourses and the distribution of medals. Did Bimba think this would appeal more to his students with middle-class and academic backgrounds or did he just wanted to make the whole ceremony appear more respectable? Both answers are likely to be correct. Yet the rituals Bimba invented were also rooted in his everyday experience of *candomblé* and traditional capoeira, as evidenced for instance in his requirement that students participate in the game of stealing the table of the daughter of the saints (*mesa de yaô*) or the attribution of silk scarves.<sup>102</sup> The introduction of colours to represent levels of hierarchy was rather a reproduction of Dr Kano's *judo* grades, themselves the result of the Westernization of Japanese martial arts. In other words, the new rituals consisted in a complex fusion of elements from Afro-Bahian culture with Brazilian academic rituals and other ingredients coming from abroad.<sup>103</sup> That is why it is inaccurate to qualify Bimba's Regional simply as a 'whitened' form of capoeira. It should rather be considered as an alternative, black modernization, which differed in many fundamental aspects from the 'whitening' or 'westernized' model proposed by Burlamaqui.

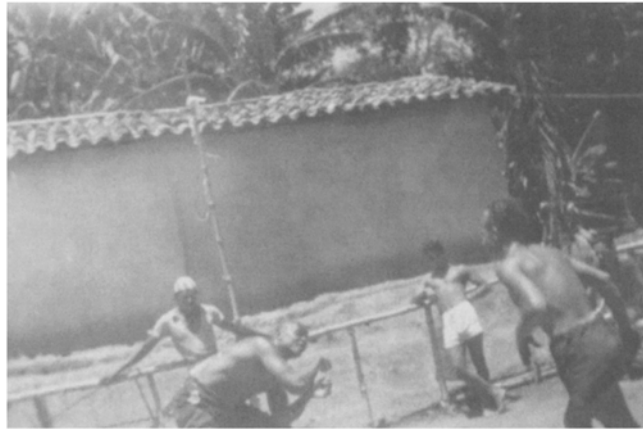
The broadening of capoeira's audience constitutes another important aspect of the modernization brought about by the Regional style, since what distinguishes modern from ancient sports is that everyone can practise them. If Bimba's role in the dissemination of capoeira is undisputed, the implications of that process are much less clear. One certainly can claim—as Bimba's students do—that capoeira 'blackened' the middle classes in cultural terms, thus contributing to the revalorization of the Afro-Brazilian culture in

Brazilian society. This, without doubt, constitutes one of Bimba's chief merits. On the other side, taking capoeira out of its original context implied that crucial aspects of the art and even its meaning might change. As we are going to see in [Chapter 7](#), the music, not supported any longer by familiarity with a specific tradition, evolved. The same rituals performed in another context might not any longer have the same meaning. According to many critics, even the movements of Regional—more upright and fast—reflect middle-class, white kinaesthetics. If it seems reasonable to assume that the broadening of the social background of capoeira practitioners had an impact on the art, it is much less clear how to assess that change. As Greg Downey has pointed out, both scholars and practitioners have rather preconceived ideas about what taste defines which class: middle-class whites for instance are supposed to be less inclined to perform rituals or they are said to prefer techniques that resemble Asian martial arts or Western gymnastics. These simplistic assumptions are difficult to prove, and exceptions too numerous. As Downey appropriately states: 'An exact correspondence between kinesthetic distinctions and social class, race, ethos, or worldview is not possible.'<sup>104</sup>

Bimba was frequently accused of having been co-opted by the powerful. His exhibitions for state governors and President Vargas are cited as proof of class betrayal. Looking at the evidence, it appears that his relationship with men in power was less intimate than often portrayed. Frede Abreu has provided a list of examples where Bimba showed contempt for the powerful, and Muniz Sodré concluded that an 'ethical abyss' separated him from the ruling military.<sup>105</sup> The fact that he died in poverty also does not suggest he had been successfully co-opted. No doubt Bimba had some important 'connections', which helped him to avoid repression and to establish his style. His supporters emphasize that the *mestre* was only resorting to a common mechanism among the Afro-Bahian community to avoid repression of their culture. All the important *candomblé* houses, for example, sought to establish links with people invested with some kind of power—police chiefs, judges, politicians, and the military. The latter were attributed honorary posts within the cult (*ogã*) in return for the protection they granted. The Interventor Juracy Magalhães, for instance, allegedly protected the *candomblé* of Bernardino do Bate Folha. Bimba was just establishing a similar pattern for his capoeira group.<sup>106</sup>

As Muniz Sodré already pointed out 30 years ago, Bimba's style maintained five decisive aspects of Afro-Bahian culture: religion, ritual songs, musical instruments, the cult of capoeira heroes and the *ginga* (see [Figure 5.6](#)).<sup>107</sup> One cannot avoid admiring how Bimba managed to combine different traditions, innovating where necessary—to avoid extinction—and preserving crucial tenets of Afro-Bahian form of capoeira in order to avoid total 'de-characterization'. Bimba's genius transformed capoeira into an art form that could be practised by wider, even white and middle-class audiences. No doubt this entailed a number of concessions to white or middle-class taste. In that respect his posture was very different from subsequent Angola *mestres* like Moraes, who maintains that students have to adapt to capoeira Angola, not the opposite.

Despite his personal financial straits, Bimba's overall strategy was immensely successful. Without him only a Burlamaqui model of a completely de-Africanized capoeira might have survived, parallel to entirely folklorized shows for tourists without any martial efficiency. The oriental martial arts would have taken over completely—as they did in so many other countries. Mestre Bimba created an alternative model of black modernization for an African derived combat tradition, which seemed to be the only one capable of avoiding both total



*Figure 5.6* One of the rare pictures showing Mestre Bimba performing the *ginga*. Courtesy of Jair Moura.

Westernization or folklorization for capoeira. In fact Mestre Pastinha proved subsequently that there was a further, 'third model' for the modernization of capoeira, which provided a further alternative to Bimba's project. Yet to a large extent Pastinha's model was only viable because Bimba had already shown the way.



## Mestre Pastinha and the codification of Angola style

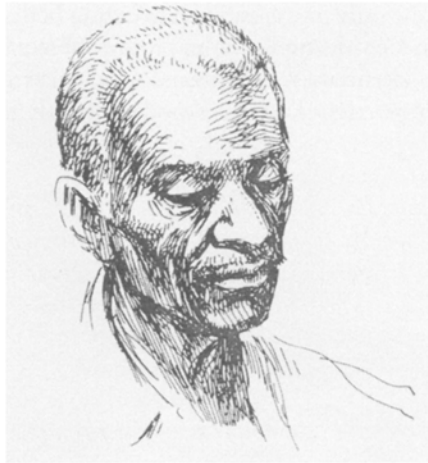


Figure 6.1 Mestre Pastinha in 1965. Drawing by A.Neves e Souza, from...*Da minha África e do Brasil que eu vi...* (Luanda: n.p., n.d.). Courtesy of the National Library, Lisbon.

### The revaluation of Afro-Bahian culture

Mestre Pastinha's outstanding contribution to the revitalization of traditional capoeira took place during a time of wider cultural change in Bahia. The decades following emancipation in Salvador were characterized by renewed attempts to eradicate the most visible and audible aspects of Afro-Bahian culture from the city in the name of progress and hygiene (see [Chapter 4](#)). Yet despite police repression and measures of hygienization, Afro-Bahian culture survived in the city. Even if some aspects still had to remain underground, Salvador certainly was among the cities with the most vibrant African derived culture in the Americas. During the 1930s the anti-African prejudices of the Bahian elites were openly challenged by the alliance forged between an avant-garde of left-wing intellectuals such as Jorge Amado, Artur Ramos and Edison Carneiro, and some of the most prominent leaders of Afro-Bahian religion, such as Martiniano Bomfim, Eugênia dos Santos (better known as 'Aninha', head of the Opô Afonjá shrine) and João da Pedra Preta (later known as Joãozinho da Goméia, head of the most famous Angola *terreiro*).

The second Afro-Brazilian Congress, in September 1937 constituted a key event for the public rehabilitation of African heritage in Bahia. A first congress, organized by Gilberto Freyre in Recife, in 1934, had already succeeded in attracting the attention of the media. This is why Edison Carneiro, Aydano



de Couto Ferraz, and Reginaldo Guimarães, supported by Artur Ramos, decided to make the Second Congress not a mere academic event, but a wider celebration of Afro-Bahian culture. They chose the month of September because that was a moment when the most important *terreiros* organized activities that could be attended by a non-initiated public.<sup>1</sup> The participants visited the most esteemed shrines of the city and a number of respected *candomblé* priests took part in the proceedings. Newspapers covered the event, in particular the *Estado da Bahia* for which Carneiro wrote on a regular basis. One of the outspoken aims of the Congress was to end police persecution of *candomblé* and the wider repression against Afro-Bahian culture. Carneiro also promoted the foundation of a federation of *candomblé* houses ('Union of Afro-Brazilian Sects'), which, once constituted, elected Martiniano Bomfim as its first president.

Alongside *candomblé*, capoeira figured prominently in the programme of the congress as a marker of Afro-Bahian culture that the organizers wanted to see rehabilitated. They rented the tennis court of the Itapagipe Club for an 'Exhibition of Capoeira de Angola'. Carneiro was not interested in the emerging Regional style, for which he showed only contempt. In line with his research on the 'Bantus' in Brazil, he rather invited some of the most famous angoleiros of the time to perform their art: his friend and informant Samuel Querido de Deus, Aberrê, Onça Preta, Barbosa and Juvenal.<sup>2</sup>

The congress thus offered, alongside the already mentioned prize matches and the exhibitions during the civic celebrations of 2 July 1936 by Bimba and his group, another entirely new public context for a capoeira performance. The art was definitively overcoming the ostracism that had contained its practice for so long. Edison Carneiro even sought to found a 'Union of Capoeiras of Bahia', similar to the 'Union of Afro-Brazilian Sects' that he effectively helped to create.<sup>3</sup> Yet in the case of the capoeira union his plan did not go beyond a declaration of intentions.

The organizers of the congress valued what they considered to be the traditional form of Bahian capoeira. By promoting a greater visibility for capoeira, the congress reinforced the ongoing shift in public opinion, which made capoeira increasingly perceived as a 'popular pastime' instead of a criminal activity. As early as 1936 the newspaper *A Tarde* had published a picture of a capoeira *roda* at the Ribeira festival, entitled: 'Dexterities of a group of *capoeiristas*, yesterday, in Penha'. This constituted an important innovation, since reports on the religious festivals had so far never included iconographic representations of capoeira. If journalists were now selecting a capoeira photo to represent popular festivals, they were encouraging the perception of the art as integral part of Afro-Bahian culture.<sup>4</sup> *Vadiação* thus started to be recognized as an art form and an expression of Afro-Bahian identity.

Mestre Pastinha's re-assessment of traditional Bahian *vadiação* and his struggle for the establishment of the Angola style took place in this context of shifting paradigms. All these developments made his programme advocating a symbolic return to Angola more likely to succeed. The 1930s–1940s also saw the emergence of the most famous revivalist movement in the Caribbean, Rastafarianism, which spread over the world in subsequent decades. At a time when Rastafarians in the mountains of Jamaica reinvented a new world religion based on the exaltation of Ethiopia (the only African country to have avoided colonial occupation), *capoeiras* in Bahia started to reaffirm the strength of their Angolan heritage. Ras Tafari, enthroned in 1930 as Haile Selassie I, claimed a direct line of descent from King Solomon,<sup>5</sup> also a popular figure invoked by *capoeiras* in their 'prayers' (*ladainhas*) and songs. No wonder that these parallel developments intersected at a later stage: today many angoleiros identify with and make wide use of Rasta symbols.



Figure 6.2 Mestre Pastinha playing the berimbau. Photo by Pierre Verger, 1946–7. By kind permission of the Pierre Verger Foundation.

### Vicente Ferreira Pastinha: his early life till 1941

Mestre Pastinha was born as Vicente Ferreira Pastinha in Salvador, 5 April 1889. Not much is known about his family background. His mother, Maria Eugenia Ferreira, was a black woman from Bahia.<sup>6</sup> His father, a Spaniard called José Pastinha, earned his living as a pedlar. Vicente's initiation to capoeira arose out of his need to defend himself. Of rather frail constitution, at the age of ten he was being bullied by a bigger boy called Honorato from his neighbourhood in Rua da Laranjeira. One day, Benedito, an elderly African living in the same street who had been watching his plight, offered to teach him a means of self-defence—capoeira. According to some accounts, Benedito was a native of Angola.<sup>7</sup> After training for some months with Benedito, Pastinha successfully gave a beating to the boy who had been harassing him. At the age of 12, Pastinha became an apprentice at the Brazilian Navy School in Salvador. We do not know if he continued to see his teacher Benedito.

The whole episode of M. Pastinha's capoeira apprenticeship raises a number of important issues. Did Pastinha learn capoeira only from Benedito and how long did he train with the Angolan? Kay Shaffer, who interviewed Pastinha in the 1970s, reports that Pastinha's apprenticeship with Benedito lasted for two years.<sup>8</sup> What exactly did he learn from him? At that time, Africans were but a small minority in the city of Salvador. Since both Bimba and Pastinha were initiated into capoeira by Africans, is it not legitimate to assume that they learned not only a heavily creolized form of capoeira, but also elements that were much closer to its African origins? Rather than centuries of separate development in Brazil, this suggests that links with Africa could be more recent and direct than Brazilian nationalists might be ready to admit. On the other side, Pastinha's teacher apparently did not use a *berimbau*, but only a drum. According to Ed Powe, Pastinha even suggested that, at the time of his apprenticeship, this was generally the case in Bahian capoeira. This would confirm the hypothesis that the association between capoeira and *berimbau* was a fairly recent, Brazilian invention (see Figure 6.2).<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the transatlantic slave trade having been abolished since 1850, it is likely that Benedito came to Brazil as a young *moleque*, otherwise he would not have been alive at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> So how much did Pastinha's African teacher know about combat games from his native land and how much did he learn in Bahia? At the time he taught Pastinha, he was a *ladino* freedman, an

ex-slave just like Bimba's teacher, the presumed captain of the Bahian Navigation Company, acculturated through 50 or 60 years in Brazil. The fact that so little is known about both Benedito and Bentinho and their teaching suggests that unlike African derived religions in Brazil—where oral traditions do reach back to the early nineteenth century—no such systematized and established body of traditions existed for capoeira at the time.

While in the Navy Pastinha learned fencing, jack-knife techniques and Swedish gymnastics. His musical skills were enhanced too: he was taught by the then famous musician Anacleto Vidal da Cunha and played—probably the horn—in the Navy orchestra.<sup>11</sup> According to his own recollections Pastinha also taught capoeira to some of his fellow sailors. He quit the Navy at the age of 20, in 1910. He then carved out a living from a number of jobs—cleaning shoes, selling newspapers, working as a carpenter or a casino bouncer. He opened his first capoeira school in a bicycle workshop on the Campo da Pólvora. After 1910 he taught artisans and students living in shared accommodation ('repúblicas') in the surrounding neighbourhood.<sup>12</sup> He therefore began his capoeira teaching long before mestre Bimba, even though again few details are known regarding his students from this early period of his life. According to an interview made in 1967, it seems that Pastinha aspired to live from the sale of his oil paintings, but never quite managed to.<sup>13</sup>

During his twenties and thirties Pastinha led the life of a typical *capoeira*, surviving from occasional jobs, participating in street *rodas* and eventually playing the tough guy. He conceded having beaten police officers on these occasions, because they were abusing him and trying to 'demoralize' him in public. Despite his rather frail stature—he is always described as 'skinny' ('franzino')—he earned respect among the world of the tough guys. A famous episode from the 1910s reveals how capoeira made Pastinha a respected fighter. According to his own testimony:

There was this friend who asked me to take care of a gambling den. I went to take care of the casino. The police chief needed me to issue a licence [with my name] to open the house. I went. They took me to Dr Álvaro Covas. When I entered, I was in the house [office] of Dr Álvaro Covas.—Doctor, this is the guy who will take care of the gambling den. He looked at me like that, he looked at me right from top to bottom with contempt.—This...this boy is going to take care of a gambling den? This kid will take care of a gambling den? My friend said:—Yes, but it is this one I want.—But this kid cannot take care of a gambling den. He said:—Yes, Doctor, he is a boy, but he is the one I want. The Doctor had to give in, isn't?—With your permission. He then turned to me and said:—What is your name?—Vicente Ferreira Pastinha. He lifted his portfolio and pulled out all the cards:—So you are the little tough guy I have here in my district? I only knew you from the complaint records, right? I said, here to myself, I said: OK, I am busted.<sup>14</sup>

Pastinha got the job and eventually entered the network of clientelism headed by the police chief Covas and the then sergeant Cosme de Farias (see [Chapter 4](#)). During street *rodas* Pastinha used to be well prepared for any eventuality. He often remembered how he always carried a little sickle that could be mounted on the *berimbau*, transforming the instrument into a powerful weapon in case of a street fight.<sup>15</sup>

Other episodes of that time relate how Pastinha threw the famous tough guy Pedro Porreta on the ground with a head butt.<sup>16</sup> Yet despite his initial fame Pastinha completely retired from capoeira in subsequent years. According to his own manuscripts he withdrew from 1912 until 1941.<sup>17</sup> Some authors assert that Pastinha taught in Salvador until the 1920s or even during the 1930s, but do not provide further evidence for their claim.<sup>18</sup>



Figure 6.3 One of the few photos showing Mestre Pastinha practising capoeira. Photo by Pierre Verger, 1946–7. By kind permission of the Pierre Verger Foundation.

### The foundation of the Centro Esportivo de Capoeira Angola— CECA, 1940s–1950s

During the 1930s the traditional Bahian capoeira became increasingly identified as ‘capoeira de Angola’, in opposition to the ‘capoeira Regional’ developed by Bimba.<sup>19</sup> Responses to the attempts at modernization among the older generation of *capoeiras* were far from clear cut and often ambiguous. Some started to take on board the changes made by Bimba. A number of *mestres* however decided to fight for the survival of the traditional *vadiação*, refusing to modernize along the lines of the Regional. Most prominent among these was a group of *mestres* who held regular *rodas* in an area called Gengibirra, located at the end of the tram line in Liberdade, a popular and mainly black neighbourhood on a hill beyond the old Centre, just above the Northern edge of the downtown area. Here *rodas* took place under the command of Mestre Amorzinho, a civil guard. His profession certainly helped the group to avoid police repression and to acquire some respectability. According to Daniel Coutinho, known as Mestre Noronha (1909–1977), this was the first centre for Capoeira Angola and had been founded by 22 *mestres* among which highly respected characters such as Antônio Maré, Onça Preta, Geraldo Chapeleiro, and Juvenal besides Amorzinho, Noronha himself and his brother Livino Diogo.<sup>20</sup>

Following the account by Pastinha, which subsequently became the most common version of the story, one of his best students, Raimundo Argollo, known as Aberrê (also spelled ABR) went there as a visitor. The *mestres* in attendance were so impressed with his game that they asked who had taught him. Aberrê therefore insisted on taking Pastinha to the Gengibirra *roda*. According to Pastinha’s manuscripts, he finally went there on 23 February 1941 to see Aberrê play:

And to my surprise Mr.Armósinho [sic] the owner of that capoeira, shaking my hand, said: It has been a long time since I wanted to hand you over this capoeira for you to teach. I still tried to avoid this by apologizing, but Mr Antonio Maré took the floor and said: There is no way, Pastinha, you are the one who will be in charge of this. Since his comrades gave me their support, I accepted.<sup>21</sup>

Noronha gave a slightly different version of that episode in his memoirs. According to him it was only upon Amorzinho's death that the other *mestres* decided to hand over to Pastinha, because neither he nor his brother Livino or Antônio Maré had the time to take care of the centre.<sup>22</sup> Although 20 years younger than Pastinha, he claimed precedence over the latter, asserting he had already 'been struggling in this *baderna* [tumult or mayhem, and by extension capoeira] for eight years and for that reason we can say Noronha, Livino, Maré and Pastinha'.<sup>23</sup> Since there was an issue between Noronha and Pastinha (who once gave a beating to Noronha's brother Livino in a *roda*) we should not be surprised by this difference in emphasis.<sup>24</sup>

If Pastinha was therefore not the first to have recognized the need to organize an angoleiro community in order to preserve the art, he certainly was one of the few *mestres* who dedicated the rest of his life to that task. Initially, though, he was not that successful in achieving his aim. According to Pastinha's own assessment, upon the death of Amorzinho, in September 1942, 'the Centre remained inactive, because it was abandoned by all the *mestres*, which today are deserters.' In 1944, Pastinha undertook a new attempt to organize the centre. He managed to get initial support from students and some old angoleiros and started to teach at the Workers' Centre ('Centro Operário'). Yet this attempt also failed because of 'lack of agreement' among the *mestres*.<sup>25</sup> Personal rivalries being a common feature among *capoeiras*, this comes as no surprise. Pastinha's long withdrawal from capoeira in previous years might have constituted a further obstacle for his recognition as a leader of capoeira Angola. It also explains why many younger *mestres* did not know him until he took over the CECA in 1941.<sup>26</sup>

In 1949, Pastinha launched a third, and more successful attempt. Ricardo Batista, an ex-instructor of martial arts of the Civil Guard, asked him to reorganize the Centre. Pastinha now managed to establish the Centro Esportivo de Capoeira Angola in the soap factory Sicoal, where he was working as a watchman. Training took place in the patio of the factory, located in Bigode, in the Brotas neighbourhood.<sup>27</sup> Here the centre finally took off, supported by friends and neighbours. Now Pastinha succeeded in getting support from famous *mestres* who were not his students. Canjiquinha took over the function of *contra-mestre* and Gato became chief of the orchestra (*mestre de bateria*) of the CECA.<sup>28</sup> The making of the first T-shirts for the group in yellow and black, the colours of Pastinha's football team Ipiranga, bears testimony to that incipient process of institutionalization. A further step was the formal registration of the CECA with the notary public, on 1 October 1952. Its statute defined the objective of the centre as 'to teach, to spread and to develop, theoretically and practically, the stylish capoeira ('capoeira de estilo'), the genuine 'ANGOLA', which has been passed on to us by the primitive [original] Africans that disembarked here in the Bay of All the Saints'.<sup>29</sup> It established a board of directors, a president, a vice-president, three secretaries, two treasurers and a librarian-archivist. Students registered at CECA received identity cards issued by the *mestre*.

### **The codification of Angola style: Pastinha's teachings**

If Bimba was a rather pragmatic teacher interested in concrete results, Pastinha liked to reflect, in conversations or in writing, about capoeira. Although he received no formal education beyond primary school, he published a short book about capoeira Angola and left several manuscripts, the most substantial one subtitled 'Metaphysics and practice of Capoeira'. He therefore became 'the first popular *capoeirista* to analyze capoeira as a philosophy and to worry about the ethical and educational aspects of its practice'.<sup>30</sup> M. Pastinha also gave many interviews that further help us to understand his teaching and his outstanding personality. If his statements in songs, interviews or his manuscripts offer one of the first insights ever of what a Bahian capoeira *mestre* thought about his art, they are however not easy to understand. Pastinha not only expressed himself in a vernacular language, shaped by his social and regional background and the

generation he belonged to but also used a range of metaphors and expressions that reflect his very distinctive personality. What he wrote and said, especially in the later years of his life, often drew on his readings and the many conversations he had with his intellectual friends. One cannot therefore assume that everything he said for instance about capoeira history stems from oral tradition nor is necessarily representative of the capoeira *mestres* of his generation. Furthermore, journalists were not always that meticulous when reproducing the *mestre*'s thoughts, often being more interested in getting a spectacular headline. They might have altered his words. The book he published was heavily copy-edited by his intellectual friends. That is why Pastinha's manuscripts remain a key source of understanding his views about capoeira. Unfortunately they have not been dated until now. In what follows I attempt to summarize his teachings but readers should be aware that any interpretation of the *mestre*'s reflections remains subject to discussion.

Pastinha identified the 'rude boys' as being responsible for the bad image of capoeira. He therefore sought to establish a clear distinction between capoeira Angola and the violence that had so far characterized some of its practitioners. These 'were individuals of bad character that used capoeira to release their aggressive instinct'. Although having in his youth experienced himself some trouble with the police he now supported stern action against the tough guys: 'Fortunately, these troublemaker *capoeiristas* constituted a small segment and deserved violent police repression'.<sup>31</sup>

Pastinha therefore recommended distance from the troublemakers of the past and their posture: 'Don't aspire to learn capoeira to be tough, but rather for the defence of your physical integrity'.<sup>32</sup> For that reason he insisted that capoeira Angola was a sport: The ethics of sports spreading at that moment throughout the Western world seemed to provide a model consistent with the type of behaviour Pastinha wanted to see implemented in the capoeira *rodas*. It might not have been the only reason. Calling his school a 'Sports Centre of Capoeira Angola' certainly eased the institutionalization of the art, since sport already enjoyed the social recognition Afro-Brazilian culture was still struggling to achieve at the time.

His teachings emphasized the need to rescue the aspects of the game likely to disappear when capoeira was used only for street fights or in prize matches. Those who want to dedicate themselves to the sport,

must seek to learn meticulously the rules of capoeira de angola [...] Unfortunately a great part of our *capoeiristas* have a very incomplete knowledge of the rules of capoeira, since it is the control of the game that protects those who practice it, so that it does not degenerate into the excesses of the free style contests (*vale tudo*).<sup>33</sup>

What rules was Pastinha referring to? Although he recognized that capoeira Angola was 'before anything, a fight and a violent fight', he sought to establish clear differentiation between its different modalities: capoeira as a game, played on squares or for friendly demonstrations; capoeira as a defence against an aggressor; and capoeira as a training method.<sup>34</sup> For games and demonstrations a number of kicks and movements had to be banned.<sup>35</sup> Pastinha emphasized in particular that grappling was prohibited in order to guarantee a proper game:

All *mestres* have the duty to make known that it is a mistake to use the hands on your opponent; and if they don't, they show not to be a *mestre*; those who have education prove their politeness playing with their comrade and do not seek conquest to sully their companion; it is time to understand, to help your sport, and help to moralize; to raise capoeira, which was already declining.<sup>36</sup>



The role of the *mestres* was therefore crucial; only they could transmit the ‘foundations’ of capoeira Angola to the younger generations. Pastinha considered himself fortunate to have had a ‘good *mestre*’. He always reminded the *capoeiristas* of his generation that they, too, had been under constant surveillance by older *mestres*:

When in the past she [capoeira] was violent, many *mestres*, and others, drew our attention, when out of rhythm, they explained decently, and gave us the education within the sport of capoeira, this is the reason all those who come from the past possess body game and have rhythm. The *mestres* kept the secrets, but never denied an explanation.<sup>37</sup>

Capoeira Angola, Pastinha insisted, was subtler than a fight for victory over an ‘opponent’ and in that respect his teachings resemble those of Japanese *budo* teachers. Pastinha appealed to his ‘comrades’ (a common denomination among *capoeiras* at the time) ‘not to aspire to fight our companions’ or to seek ‘acclamations of triumph’ by defeating others. Rather *capoeiristas* should play,

without ambitions, without ill will, without disappointments, without pushing to the front to play before your turn; if all companions understand [the need] to find these mistakes among themselves, only then will we be happy.

Pastinha wanted capoeira to act as a means of self control and education:

The good *capoeirista* never gets exalted [but] always tries to remain calm in order to be able to reflect with precision and rightness; he does not quarrel with his comrades or pupils, he does not play without being his turn; in order not to anger his companions and create squabbles; he teaches his pupils without trying to exhibit himself in an aggressive way or show bad manners [...]

In short, Pastinha wanted *capoeiristas* to abide by the rules and display what he called ‘sportive gentlemanly manners’ (*cavalheirismo esportivo*).<sup>38</sup>

In the understanding of M. Pastinha then, capoeira Angola was more encompassing than sports, even though he often referred to capoeira Angola as a sport, or even as ‘my Swedish [gymnastics]’.<sup>39</sup> He emphasized in particular the role of music—rhythms and lyrics—during the game: ‘Capoeira is only beautiful when playing, and singing, and only lost its beauty when [people] don’t sing [any longer]’. He also wrote

It is the duty of all *capoeiristas*, it is not a failing not to know how to sing; but it is a failing not to know how to reply, at least the chorus. People who do not sing the chorus are forbidden to participate in the orchestra.<sup>40</sup>

Pastinha, together with the other icons of the Angola style such as Waldemar or Cobrinha Verde, emphasized the role of music in controlling and giving meaning to the game, the need to learn the ‘foundations’ of capoeira, and the initiatory character of the art requiring a long process of apprenticeship in order to be able to pass on the knowledge to younger generations. All this made capoeira Angola more than a simple sport, but a philosophy and an elaborate ritual. That is why Pastinha, for instance, insisted in maintaining the *chamadas* although they did not train fighting efficacy.



Pastinha was not—unlike Bimba and many other *capoeiras* of his time—an active practitioner of *candomblé*, although he always showed great respect for Afro-Bahian religion. In some pages of his manuscripts he refers to the ‘sacred Scripts’ and Jesus, revealing his strong belief in a Christian god.<sup>41</sup> In an interview he declared to be ‘neither Catholic, nor of *candomblé*. I believe in God, only one God’ and asserted his respect for all religions.<sup>42</sup> For Pastinha, capoeira Angola constituted an equally ‘sacred patrimony’ which he passionately aspired to preserve. His often stated necessity to ‘love’ capoeira Angola probably was a sentiment akin to love in the Christian faith. According to his friend the sculptor Mário Cravo ‘Pastinha was a mystic, because he lived capoeira with intensity and made his own interpretation of the mystic universe’.<sup>43</sup>

In accordance with his faith stood the duty to serve his community. Given the past animosities among *capoeiras*, Pastinha considered it his responsibility to help organizing the Angoleiro community through the CECA: ‘we should not remain isolated, because [then] there is nothing we can do; the popular saying is more than right which says: unity gives strength’.<sup>44</sup> M. Pastinha passionately defended this ideal during his entire life, because he believed capoeira Angola deserved much higher regards than it was commonly given by society. He was convinced that ‘capoeira is trying to enter, and live in society, [and] the actual and future *capoeirista* is respectful, and decent’.<sup>45</sup> According to him, all *mestres* had the duty to teach capoeira Angola, and he blamed those who ‘deserted’ from that obligation:

A friend asked me that question: Pastinha, why does this comrade not play with skill? Yes, because they did not teach him to play within the rules; all *mestres* have to know the rules and many do not. I know *mestres* who know as much as I do, but they do not teach; everybody knows that when the cat taught the jaguar, what happened?<sup>46</sup>

In other words, although he condemned the reluctance of many *mestres* to teach, he recognized the necessity for the teacher to always keep at least one secret resource. That is why the cat, when teaching the jaguar, omitted to teach one move, which helped him to escape when the jaguar decided to eat the cat. In Pastinha’s case this was said to be the movement called *pulo da onça* (‘the leap of the jaguar’).<sup>47</sup>

Why did Pastinha and his companions advocate so strongly for the traditional capoeira modality to be called and identified with Angola? Afro-American culture and identity in Bahia, was, perhaps more than in many other plantation regions, based on specific ‘nations’, that had reconstituted themselves under slavery. After the end of the slave trade and even more so after abolition, religious communities became the ‘principal repositories’ of African derived cultural traditions.<sup>48</sup> The identification with a specific ‘nation’ was crucial for the establishment of a concrete link with an African homeland. It was more appealing for Bahians of African descent and offered a stronger symbolism than ‘Afro-Brazilian’, a relatively recent term, which only started to be adopted and propagated at the time, mostly by academics.

More important than a concrete biological ancestry, which in the end could not matter that much in a highly mixed population, it meant the adoption of a specific, African derived tradition. It certainly struck a chord with anybody acquainted with the ‘nations’ in *candomblé*. In 1937, 15 *candomblé* shrines, out of the 67 founding members of the ‘Union of Afro-Brazilian Sects’, declared to be of the Angola ‘nation’, and another seven claimed to belong to ‘nations’ also broadly identified with the Kongo/Angola region.<sup>49</sup> As we have seen in Chapter 4, Angola in this context represented a neo-African identity of slaves and their descendants in the American diaspora rather than an original African ethnicity or the actual state with that name. Asserting that capoeira was the continuation of an Angolan manifestation constituted therefore a perfectly coherent practice in the context of Afro-Bahian culture of the post-emancipation period, even though Pastinha innovated in so far as he applied the concept of ‘nation’ to another type of manifestation.

Claiming that capoeira originated in Angola allowed Pastinha to ‘re-Africanize’ a practice at a time reformers such as Bimba claimed that capoeira was Brazilian altogether, and had been entirely developed in the New World. Pastinha did not entirely reject that opinion, but in contrast to Bimba thought it important to emphasize the ancestral link with Angola. It is not easy to summarize Pastinha’s position regarding the question of capoeira origins, since most of his statements were made in answer to specific questions or challenges and he shifted his emphasis over the years. The sentence ‘Capoeira came from Africa’ in his *ladainha* ‘Bahia, nossa Bahia’ has been interpreted as an indication that capoeira came, as a fully developed art, from Africa. In his manuscripts Pastinha refers on several occasion to the question of origins. Under the heading ‘Capoeira is the fight of the fights’ he asks for instance:

Why is Capoeira the second fight? Because the first one is from the *caboclos* [Pastinha means here the native Brazilians and their descendants], and the [one of the] Africans joined with the dance, parts of the *batuque* and parts of the *candomblé*, [and] they looked for their modality. In each parish an African [had] the responsibility to teach, to make it the weapon against his persecutor, they communicated through improvised chants, danced and sang plots, invented tricks and games [...]<sup>50</sup>

Angelo Decânio interprets this reference to the ‘first fight’ being of that of the *caboclos* as an ‘indicator for the Brazilian origin of capoeira’.<sup>51</sup> If that were the case, why did Pastinha emphasize the role of the Africans teaching ‘in each parish’? Another passage seems however to confirm that Pastinha believed the *caboclos* and the Jejes (Brazilian denomination for the Gbe-speaking Fon and Ewe from Dahomey) had both made a contribution towards capoeira:

With faith and courage to teach the youth of the future I am only looking after this marvellous fight which was left as a child, aquired from the primitive dance of the *caboclos* (Indians), from the *batuque*, and the *candomblé* originated by the Africans from Angola or Jejes.<sup>52</sup>

The question of capoeira origins was already a tricky one then. It seems that no detailed oral tradition about its Angolan origins any longer existed at the time, beyond the generic belief shared by practitioners—and documented since Manuel Querino at the beginning of the nineteenth century—that it was a ‘game from Angola’, and some occasional references to Luanda or Angola in capoeira songs. That is, angoleiros could not rely on such a powerful connection as that of candomblé ‘nations’, where liturgical language, names of ancestors, kings and gods provided strong links to the ancestral homelands. Pastinha was caught between several constraints. The reaffirmation of the Angolan heritage was not unproblematic in the Brazilian context. The assertion of African-ness itself was still perceived in Brazil as ‘unpatriotic’ and ‘divisive’. Both populist and military regimes were always keen to suppress any attempts of autonomous black organization. In 1937, for instance, the Vargas Regime dissolved the moderate Black Movement (Frente Negra Brasileira, founded in 1931 in São Paulo) along with all other parties.

Claiming Angola as a marker of traditionalism represented a challenge even within the Afro-Brazilian community. As we have seen, the Nagô (Yoruba) had established a hegemony over Afro-Bahian culture and religion, which was consolidated in the 1930s. ‘Bantus’ were, among both academics and Afro-Bahians, considered as inferior and not faithful to traditions. Proclaiming a revivalism based on Angola represented therefore a double challenge and even a temerity. That might explain why Pastinha welcomed the *n’golo* hypothesis by Neves e Souza who visited his academy in the 1960s (see Chapters 1 and 2) and occasionally mentioned or even adopted the myth of the Zebra dance in later years. Yet he always remained less

dogmatic on the issue than some present-day angoleiros: ‘There are many stories about the origins of capoeira which nobody knows if they are true or not. The game of the zebra is one of them’.<sup>53</sup>

At the same time Pastinha was and felt Brazilian, and also subscribed to the emerging nationalism that characterized the whole period 1930–1985, during which the country was struggling against underdevelopment and trying to find its place among other nations. That is why Pastinha saw capoeira as a means to improve the health of the Brazilian people in general: ‘...our ideal of a perfect capoeira, cleaned of mistakes, of a strong and healthy race that in a near future we will give to our beloved Brazil’.<sup>54</sup> In some interviews he reaffirmed both the Angolan ancestry and the Brazilian-ness of capoeira:

Capoeira is not mine. It is from the African. Something from the Africans remained for me. I have inherited something. I am the inheritor of the art of the Africans. But capoeira is Brazilian, it is a national heritage.<sup>55</sup>

Given his own doubts and the different, and largely incompatible constraints and pressures from different sides to make the story of capoeira fit in one particular master narrative, one should not wonder that the *mestre* wisely avoided to give a clear cut answer:

When they ask me where capoeira comes from, I reply, I don’t know, because the mestres of my time, they did not say it, it [capoeira] has so much complication [‘enredo’]. There are *capoeiristas* along all beaches, and parishes...<sup>56</sup>

This statement was perfectly in line with his idea of capoeira as an initiatory process, where no definitive answers are given to beginners or outsiders. It is from this background that one can understand the struggle that Pastinha undertook patiently to establish the Angola style during his life. As I have tried to point out in [Chapter 4](#), the Bahian *vadição* did constitute neither a unified practice nor a firmly established and homogenous tradition. Perhaps Pastinha’s main contribution was to have re-invented both.

He consolidated the ‘tradition’ by formalizing the rules for a capoeira Angola game. As we have seen, he deliberately chose not to introduce new kicks from other martial arts in order to preserve what he considered to be the ‘characteristics’ of traditional capoeira. He rather wanted his students to improve their understanding of the few ‘principal kicks’ (*cabeçada*, *rasteira*, *rabo de arraia*, *chapa de frente*, *chapa de costas*, *meia lua* and *cutilada de mão*). Only then would they be able to grasp their complexity, and the many variations that existed for each. These movements allowed for a proper *jogo de dentro* or ‘inner game’—considered by Pastinha the main modality to develop endurance and *malícia* (cunning).<sup>57</sup>

As a consequence, some moves—even though they might have been used in street *rodas* so far—had to be banned. Especially high kicks (*martelo*, *queixada*—the latter being referred to as *meia lua virada* by Pastinha) were frowned upon. Pastinha did however teach acrobatic *balões* to his students, even though he does not seem to have used them for demonstrations.<sup>58</sup> One should however bear in mind that drawing the boundary between the ‘allowed’ movements of the Angola style and the ‘forbidden’ kicks of the ‘de-characterized’ capoeira did not happen without hesitations and corrections and still is an object of dispute (see [Chapter 7](#)).

Regarding the music of capoeira Angola, Pastinha also made a conscious choice of what elements within a much broader, and less formalized tradition and practice were to be maintained. He institutionalized the existing *ladainha*, *chula* and *corrido* as the trilogy for a proper capoeira game. On the other hand he did not feel it necessary to adopt the *quadra*, which, as a consequence, almost disappeared from capoeira Angola.<sup>59</sup> In other words, just like Bimba he simplified a more complex and contradictory practice. By determining

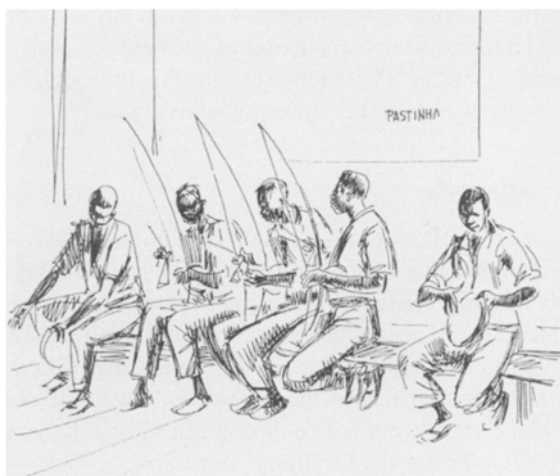


Figure 6.4 *Bateriade Capoeira* : M.Pastinha's students in the academy in Pelourinho Square in Salvador's old city centre. Drawing by A.Neves e Souza, from...*Da minha África e do Brasil que eu vi...* (Luanda: n.p., n.d.). Courtesy of the National Library, Lisbon.

what songs were acceptable for the *roda*, I believe he also contributed to establish clearer boundaries between capoeira on one side, and *maculelê*, *samba de roda* and *candomblé* on the other.

M.Pastinha also institutionalized the instruments that were to integrate the capoeira Angola orchestra. He tried out a range of solutions. At times his *bateria* played with guitars ('*viola de corda*') and at some stage he even introduced Spanish castanets in the *roda*.<sup>60</sup> During exhibitions his group also used a changing combination of instruments. The now formalized solution of three *berimbaus*, two *pandeiros*, one *agogô*, one *reco-reco* and one *atabaque* was probably not in place until the 1960s.<sup>61</sup> The combination of these instruments clearly was an innovation, and did not relate to any capoeira tradition in particular, although one could argue that Pastinha invented within a broader Afro-Bahian tradition. Three *berimbaus* allowed for complementary rhythms to develop and suited Pastinha's aims. As an accomplished musician he wanted the Angola style to cultivate the musical aspects of what he considered was an art, and in his understanding capoeira required that the *berimbau* presided over the *roda* (see Figure 6.4).

Similar to Bimba, Pastinha formalized capoeira practice: students took regular classes in a closed 'academy'. He was no particular friend of street *rodas* during festivals. His students had to wear uniforms during training sessions and exhibitions. Uniforms changed over the years, but all of them were clearly inspired by sport jerseys (see Figure 6.5). In the end Pastinha adopted the colours of his football club Ipiranga, yellow and black, which became the hallmarks of the Angola style as taught by him. His aim to instruct the 'next generation' of *mestres* also resulted in the institutionalization of hierarchies. As Pastinha claimed in his memoirs, he 'gave to the Capoeira Centre [CECA] a *mestre de campo* ['master of the field—a post in the military hierarchy], a master of the songs, a master of the orchestra, masters of the archives, an inspector, *contra-mestre* [person next to the *mestre* in the capoeira hierarchy] [...]'<sup>62</sup>

### The struggle to establish the Angola style

For angoleiros of modest means founding a school in the context of Bahian society, where the state provided no systematic backing for this kind of cultural activity, required private support and connections.



Figure 6.5 Mestre Pastinha's group in a Bahian neighbourhood; the uniforms inspired by football jerseys. Photo by Pierre Verger, 1946–7. By kind permission of the Pierre Verger Foundation.

Fortunately Pastinha could rely on a handful of well-placed friends. As we have seen, a number of intellectuals and artists strongly empathized with his struggle to maintain a 'pure' version of capoeira. At that time, many of them sympathized with communism or more generally the left. For that reason they could not always be of great help: Edison Carneiro for example had to hide from police during the Vargas dictatorship and was again banned from public posts after the 1964 military coup.

Pastinha was a close friend of writers Wilson Lins and Jorge Amado, sculptor Mário Cravo and painter Caribé (to whom we owe some of the most beautiful capoeira drawings). Wilson Lins entered politics and became an MP, later President of the Bahian Assembly, President of the Bahian Academy of Writers, and Bahian Secretary of Education. He, and other middle-class 'sportsmen', such as Atlídio Caldeira and Dr José Colmenero, trained with M. Pastinha and eventually assumed the presidency or other posts within the CECA.<sup>63</sup>

During the 1960s Jorge Amado turned out to be the most popular and celebrated Brazilian writer. Not withstanding his leftist past and the years lived in exile he also became the official chronicler of the city and its inhabitants. He was an unconditional admirer of Pastinha and made him figure prominently in his writings.<sup>64</sup> Amado thus contributed to consecrate the old teacher as an icon of Bahian and hence Brazilian culture:

*Mestre Pastinha, master of capoeira de Angola and of Bahian cordiality, human being of high civilization, man of the of the people with all its wit, is one of the great of Bahia, one of its illustrious, one of its obás [Yoruba ruler], of its chiefs. He is the first in his art; he keeps the tradition and transmits it; master of dexterity and courage, loyalty and fraternal conviviality. In his school, at the Pelourinho, Mestre Pastinha constructs Brazilian culture, from the most real and best kind.*<sup>65</sup>

It was thanks to this little network that Pastinha managed to obtain some official support, and, in 1955, a space for his academy in the colonial building at 19, Rua Gregória de Mattos, located on the famous

Pelourinho Square in the old city centre.<sup>66</sup> The move to that impressive town house in such a central location contributed towards the success of Pastinha's group.<sup>67</sup>

During that period only a few other angoleiros were still teaching. M.Waldemar, supported by M.Traira, maintained a school in the Liberdade neighbourhood. M.Caiçara and M.Sete Molas opened academies in that same area, whilst M.Cobrinha Verde taught in Chame-Chame and later Amaralina, M.Gato in Calabar, M.José Domingos and M.Rafael in Roça do Juliana, M.Curió at the Ladeira de Saude and M.Espinho Remoso in Fazenda Grande. Other angoleiro mestres, such as M.Canjiquinha and M.Bigodinho, thought it necessary to make concessions to the expanding Regional and ended up teaching a mixture of Regional and Angola.<sup>68</sup> And most of the other *mestres* who taught did not deliver the same kind of systematic teaching as Pastinha. The fact that just half a dozen of other veteran angoleiros (out of many dozens considered to be of *mestre* level) managed to establish and maintain schools with regular teaching further contributed to enhance Pastinha's core role for the continuity of the Angola style.

During the 1960s the CECA became widely recognized as the main school of capoeira Angola. As F.Abreu explains:

The Sunday *roda* of Pastinha's academy filled the gap left by the discontinuation of the other Sunday *rodas* of Waldemar da Paixão, in Pero Vaz [...] and Cobrinha Verde at the Mirante do Chame-Chame [...]—which had been animated meeting points for the Angoleiros of Bahia.<sup>69</sup>

M.Pastinha taught every Tuesday and Thursday (later also Friday) evening, and held an open *roda* on Sunday afternoons, which many famous *mestres* used to attend. Pastinha slowly built up a group of advanced students, many of whom later became *mestres* and teachers in their own right: João Pequeno, João Grande, Boca Rica, Gildo Alfinete, Bola Sete and others.

Despite the fact that some women *capoeiras* existed among the older generation, few if any women in Bahia trained and became advanced students in Pastinha's academy or any other schools of the city. The mestre repeatedly lamented the fact that women in Bahia were not training capoeira since 'the women must also take her share in the defense of the home'.<sup>70</sup> His emancipationist views on the matter crystallized in the famous saying that 'capoeira is for man, child and woman'.

M.Boca Rica reveals that Pastinha represented much more than a mere instructor of physical education for his students:

Pastinha was an excellent mestre, a humble person, a friend, you understand? I considered him my second father. Any place he went, he took me along with him, he liked me very much [...] We talked... Sometimes I went there [to the academy] early...during the week I went there early to talk with him until the start of the class. He put the wooden bench and told us to do the movements. Half moon from the front, half moon from the back, the stingray's tail...He set out the chair [for us] to give a stingray's tail over the chair, under the chair, and in the middle. He put the oldest one to explain [to the others] the rhythms, the name of the rhythms, the significance of all this.<sup>71</sup>

From the 1960s onwards tourists started to visit the academy to watch the 'authentic' capoeira Angola. Visitors to the academy usually pointed out that Pastinha's academy was well looked after, 'organized', and offered an 'equilibrated and methodized teaching'.<sup>72</sup> An inscription over the door of his academy stated his African revivalism: 'Angola, mother capoeira. Slave *mandinga* [witchcraft] in the quest for freedom; its beginning has no method, its end is not conceivable for the wisest *capoeirista*'.



Dressed in an impeccable linen suit, always holding an umbrella, Pastinha became a popular and widely respected figure in Salvador and beyond. Newspaper articles often reproduced some details of his everyday life to make readers feel they shared the life of this popular character and icon of Brazilian folklore.

When he has nothing to do, he lingers at the door of the grocery store Cadete, on the Taboão [slope], in front of the Pelourinho, discussing, remembering his exploits or those of his friends. The *mestre* has the habit to ask, while talking,—have you read that? He talks with the same gestures than he plays capoeira.<sup>73</sup>

This growing respect allowed him in return to build up some cultural capital which was greatly needed for the establishment of the Angola style. During the 1960s Pastinha, looking back towards his achievements could already claim that:

Now, capoeira Angola is practised by all social segments, and enjoys the protection and prestige of the authorities for being one of the most authentic manifestations of national folklore.<sup>74</sup>

Once his school in Salvador was up and running, Pastinha—just like Bimba—sought to work towards the diffusion of his style in other regions of Brazil. Since prize-fighting matches had not proved the right arena, there was a need to open new channels for the expansion of capoeira Angola.

Fortunately for Bimba and Pastinha, at that time Bahia was being consecrated as a privileged marker of national identity. Here Luso-Catholic roots stretched back to early colonial times. Meanwhile the more recent migration of Germans, Italians, Japanese and Syrian-Lebanese had created more heterogeneous cultural patterns in the South. Thus Brazilian culture seemed to be nowhere more genuine than in Bahia, and for that reason the Vargas regime and its successors promoted Bahian popular culture as the authentic expression of Brazilian-ness.

The wider rescue of popular culture as an expression of genuine national identity was already well under its way at the time. It related rather to the left wing of the modernist movement, whereas the right wing preferred to promote Luso-tropicalism or neo-colonial architecture. The whole period 1947–1964 was characterized by an intense mobilization around these issues known as the ‘folkloric movement’. Although the state-sponsored National Folklore Commission (Comissão Nacional de Folclore—CNFL) had been created as early as 1947, official support became especially important during Vargas’ second term in office, 1951–1954. The CNFL encouraged the creation of regional commissions, organized Folklore Weeks and five Congresses of Brazilian Folklore between 1951 and 1963.<sup>75</sup> Key organizers within the CNFL were Renato Almeida and Edison Carneiro, both of which had researched and promoted capoeira Angola.

The development of tourism ran parallel to this rediscovery of Brazilian popular culture. The mayor of Salvador created a Department of Tourism in 1954 to support that growing sector of Bahian economy.<sup>76</sup> This department stimulated the creation of folklore groups for exhibitions. Since the idea was to give a general idea of the variety of Bahian folklore, groups usually included demonstrations of *candomblé* dances, capoeira and other popular games, such as *maculêlê* or *puxada de rede*. In 1955 the Bahian Folklore Company Oxumaré travelled to São Paulo with six ‘daughters of saints’, two *capoeiristas* students of Pastinha, other musicians, and the famous candomblé de Angola priest Joãozinho da Goméia. The group not only represented the ‘pure, choreographed’ capoeira Angola, but also provoked a crisis in a local *umbanda* group, criticized by Joãozinho for not being ‘authentic’ enough.<sup>77</sup>

In that same year, Pastinha and Traira presided over a capoeira Angola performance at the Third National Congress of Tourism, in Salvador.<sup>78</sup> Yet the first major trip organized by the Department of Tourism, and



the Bahian MP Nita Costa, took Bimba and his group to Rio de Janeiro, in 1956, where they did a demonstration in the Maracanzinho stadium, alongside with the local police band and the samba singer Elizete Cardoso. The whole show proved to be a success and eventually persuaded other sponsors to support this kind of event.<sup>79</sup>

A couple of years later—in 1959—the Bahian Department of Tourism and the airline company Lóide Aéreo Brasileiro sponsored an excursion for Mestres Pastinha and Canjiquinha, and five of Pastinha's best students (Bigodinho, João Grande, João Pequeno, Almiro Honorato and Vivaldo) to Porto Alegre, where the Brazilian army accommodated them. With them came a handful of 'beautiful *morenas* [brown women]', among which the Yacht Club candidate for the 'Miss Bahia' title, supposedly to reassert 'the prestige of the beauty of the Bahian woman'. This kind of combination for one single event illustrates how capoeira Angola was, at that moment, still struggling to establish a space on its own among displays of folkloric dance, 'primitive' religion, and beauty contests.

On their way back Pastinha and his group stopped over in Rio de Janeiro, where they gave a show for the press at the prestigious Hotel Glória. The presentation seemed to have matched the journalists' expectations of a 'picturesque' spectacle. Pastinha's dexterity, despite his advanced age (he was already 70) never failed to impress the audience, as well as his resistance (he played for more than 20 minutes with different students). His elegant movements were invariably likened to those of a cat. The music of capoeira seemed to have produced a cultural shock in its own right. Comments in Southeastern mainstream newspapers consistently associated the music of capoeira with that of Afro-Brazilian religions—known at the time under the rather derogatory term *macumba*. The reception of Bahian capoeira groups during the 1950s in the main cities of the Southeast made obvious the cultural distance between the Brazilian middle-class public and the Afro-Bahian culture—a gap that capoeira was attempting to narrow.<sup>80</sup>

Pastinha and his group eventually made some other trips within Brazil, for instance to the 'Night of International Folklore' at the Minas Tennis Club, in Belo Horizonte, in 1964.<sup>81</sup> They also gave a demonstration at the National School of Physical Education in Rio, in 1961.

During these early demonstrations Pastinha created a specific pattern for shows:

[Pastinha] made thirty *sapinhos* (frog jumps), in the *roda*. He made it for the tourists to see. After that he gave thirty or forty *rabo de arraia*, alone, for the show, for the tourists. He took a student: Vermelho da Moenda, or Anselmo, João Pequeno. He did *rabo de arraia* and they [only] did *negativa* [...]<sup>82</sup>

The *mestre*'s ultimate accomplishment was, without doubt, his trip to Africa. His group was part of the Brazilian delegation attending the First World Festival of Black Arts (Festival des Arts Nègres), in Dakar, Senegal, in April 1966. The delegation demonstrated capoeira,<sup>83</sup> traditional *samba de roda*, *lundus*, and modern samba presented by well-known artists (Clementina de Jesus, Ataulfo Alves and Elizete Cardoso), and also included outstanding *candomblé* priests (Olga from Alaketo) and academics researching Afro-Bahian culture (W. Freitas, E. Carneiro).<sup>84</sup> M. João Grande still remembers how much the *capoeiristas* were moved when they saw Africans near the hotel dancing to a *balafó* (a type of xylophone) and executing movements that resembled those of capoeira.<sup>85</sup>

Yet Pastinha's health was deteriorating: a cataract, not treated for lack of money, was slowly blinding him. By the time he went to Senegal he was already almost sightless and unable to play. Now the *mestre* had to stop travelling altogether and retreated to the academy where he continued to receive many visitors from afar. But his complicated and—according to his words—'disturbed life' (*vida atrapalhada*) was not yet over.

### The last years

Soon another kind of predicament was added to the problems of Pastinha's deteriorating health. In the early 1970s he lost his academy when the Foundation for the Artistic and Cultural Heritage (IPAC) required the old colonial house for restoration. Upon the completion of the renovation, however, the building was handed over to a school for cooking apprentices and their restaurant (the SENAC), which offered 'typical' Bahian food for tourists. In that process Pastinha lost all the possessions of his school: 14 benches and other furniture made of jacarandá wood, many instruments, his paintings, and the archives with the register of his students.

The old *mestre* never recovered from this traumatic experience. He received a small compensation, and, due to the lobbying of his friend Jorge Amado, was granted a pension by the city of Salvador. Yet that sum—one minimum wage according to most accounts, three according to other sources—was not enough for him, his wife Maria Romélia de Oliveira and his three children (he had adopted a further 15 during his life, most of whom were adults then). Maria Romélia sold *acarajés* (Bahian fast food made from beans fried in palm oil, derived from West African cuisine) in the streets of Salvador to make ends meet, but Pastinha could not afford to rent another space. They had to live in one squalid room in a deteriorating building located at 14, Ladeira do Pelourinho, where dozens of families shared one single bathroom. In 1979, again due to the action taken by some friends such as Vivaldo da Costa Lima, the city granted him another space in the Rua Gregório de Matos to reopen his school at Ladeira do Ferrão, near the place of his former academy. There his students João Pequeno, João Grande and Ângelo taught, while Pastinha was sitting on a chair, eventually correcting some pupils by the sound produced when falling on the floor of the academy, or lecturing students and visitors about the 'foundations' of capoeira Angola. Yet visitors did not fail to note that his school was not any longer what it used to be.

At this stage Pastinha was already embittered by the lack of support: 'The newspapers only want to make headlines with me, but they don't help me'. At the end of 1979 he suffered a stroke and went to a public hospital for a year. After being discharged he spent his last months in a shelter for old people without resources, the Abrigo Dom Pedro II, where he died 13 November 1981, aged 93. He was buried that same day at the Campo Santo Cemetery, and his friend Caribé had to pay for the funeral. Because radio and television did not immediately learn of his death, only about 40 people attended the funeral: the old people from the Abrigo, some members of his family, his students, and three capoeira Regional *mestres*. The city of Salvador was represented by its Health Secretary. Some chords of a *berimbau* were played inside the cemetery as a last homage and a *berimbau* was laid next to Pastinha's corpse.<sup>86</sup>

Despite protection from a number of influential friends during his lifetime, M. Pastinha died in abject poverty, just like M. Bimba had done seven years earlier. This resembled the way classic *malandros* often ended their days, dumped by the powerful when they were no longer in a position to threaten others or to be useful in any way. Pastinha's sad end seemed to illustrate the uncomfortable truth that patronage was not a perfect life insurance for the poor, and how Brazilian society and the state dealt with its popular heroes. Pastinha's death in poverty subsequently featured prominently in his life story as told in capoeira circles and served as a further proof of the 'betrayal' of an unappreciative government.<sup>87</sup>

### Conclusion

Angelo Decânio, the editor of Pastinha's main manuscript, wrote that 'the Angola brought a body of doctrine... the objective to perpetuate a social praxis... regional... Bahian... from Santo Amaro... added to a philosophy... that Pastinha wisely injected since its origins...' <sup>88</sup> Even though I would argue that the Bahian *vadição* already had its own ethics, it is undeniable that Pastinha added a new spiritual and communal dimension when he codified Capoeira Angola. That a social praxis was perpetuated thanks to Pastinha and the CECA is

correct insofar as the ritualized forms of capoeira were likely to disappear in the process of modernization (we have seen this happen in the case of the functional capoeira taught by Burlamaqui and Sinhozinho). Yet to what extent could the praxis of *vadição* be perpetuated in its entirety if the social context changed?

Most contemporary angoleiros tend to assert that contemporary capoeira Angola is almost identical with the Bahian *vadição* of the 1920s. By insisting on the continuities, however, they tend to de-emphasize Pastinha's input. I have tried to show how important his personal contribution was. First of all he certainly deserves credit for his attempts to organize an angoleiro community and to coordinate the response to the changes introduced by Bimba and other modernizers. He was the main figure responsible for the codification of contemporary *vadição*, which resulted in the modern capoeira Angola style. In other words Pastinha made a conscious choice of which elements within a much broader, and less formalized tradition and practice were to be maintained. He established which instruments were part of the capoeira orchestra, which songs, movements and types of games were acceptable. Inspired by Western models of sport and Eastern examples of martial arts, he—just like M.Bimba—moved training and *rodas* away from the street, instituted the *academia*, created uniforms, started to teach women and presented capoeira to new audiences. These were important innovations, even if M.Pastinha undoubtedly remained much closer to existing traditions than Bimba.

The relationship between both is shrouded in mystery. When did they first meet? According to some sources they did on several occasions, but never talked about capoeira. Attempts by the press to organize a meeting never materialized. Pastinha reported how both met at the Abaeté lagoon in Salvador, in 1957, for a demonstration.<sup>89</sup> They also attended a capoeira event organized by M.Vermelho and Zoião at the Antônio Balbino secondary school.<sup>90</sup> In comments to the press, they criticized each other's style, but never indulged in personal attacks. On the contrary, both Bimba and Pastinha professed respect for each other.<sup>91</sup> Yet when the excellent *berimbau* player Gigante started to perform for Bimba, Pastinha did not want him at CECA any longer.<sup>92</sup>

A number of more or less fantasized accounts circulate regarding the encounters between Bimba and Pastinha. According to one version Pastinha told a journalist two police officers once tried to arrest M.Bimba. Bimba declared he could not see any man to take him away and knocked them down. Pastinha arrived and said: 'Leave the boys, Bimba'. Only then did the policemen realize whom they had been trying to arrest. They all ended up at the police station, where the officer in command released Bimba—he had been his student.<sup>93</sup>

Even though other figures contributed significantly to establish Regional and Angola, the emergence of both styles cannot be dissociated from these two giants. A brief comparison between the character and the contribution of the two *mestres* can help us to understand the particularities of both styles.

A common view asserts that Bimba 'whitened' whereas Pastinha 're-africanized' capoeira. In fact Bimba was certainly the more 'African' of both. Being, in contrast to Pastinha, a practitioner of *candomblé*, *batuque* and *samba de roda*, Bimba at least was more rooted in Afro-Bahian culture. Precisely for that reason he never needed to make a point in that respect. Capoeira for him was part of that broader tradition. Bimba was above all a fighter and in search of fighting efficiency made the changes he thought necessary for the survival of capoeira as a combat technique, just as Africans before him had adopted European weapons if they thought they were useful. He had not 'betrayed his roots'; he only thought that in the case of combat, fighting efficiency was paramount, and ruled over the preservation of rituals in capoeira.

Pastinha, in contrast, was more of an intellectual moralizer and a mystic. Even if we do not know what role his Spanish background played in his upbringing, he clearly was closer to a Western cultural tradition. Capoeira for him was located at the core of his mystic approach to life. Bimba, the *candomblé* practitioner, whilst expecting his *orixás* to protect him in the *roda*, did not need capoeira to provide that kind of spiritual

experience. Yet despite Pastinha's greater proximity to Western intellectual traditions, he entered the history book as the revitalizer of traditional *vadição*. This should not necessarily surprise, as history is full of visionaries who re-invented national, 'anti-Western' traditions based on the intimate knowledge of the West.

M. Pastinha showed how a man in his seventies could still play, do acrobatics and catch out much younger *capoeiristas*. Capoeira for him was a holistic, spiritual exercise that even helped him to fight aging.<sup>94</sup> Bimba, in contrast, stopped playing when he could not win any longer against younger players.<sup>95</sup> Rather than interpreting their role only in terms of a simplistic white/black dichotomy, I would suggest that their respective styles offered different solutions to the polarities between which all capoeira practice ultimately evolved: fast and slow, ritual and combat, playful and antagonistic.

During one of his last interviews, Pastinha had said: 'The secret of capoeira is dying with me and with many other [old] mestres. Today there is only a lot of acrobatics and very little capoeira'.<sup>96</sup> During his last years, and even more so after his death, capoeira Angola was depicted in the media as an art in extinction: 'He [Pastinha] is the last *capoeirista* de Angola in Brazil, known in the whole country. He has no successors nor students [...]'<sup>97</sup> The incredible revival of capoeira Angola after his death was to show how mistaken these views were.



## Contemporary capoeira, 1950–2004

Thanks to the dedication of some *mestres* in Salvador, in particular Bimba and Pastinha, capoeira was taught to a new generation of Bahians. These *mestres* also rehabilitated the art's public image and made it known to a wider Brazilian public. Yet the practice of Regional and Angola styles, with a *berimbau*, still remained largely restricted to Bahia in the 1950s. Capoeira exhibitions attracted audiences throughout the country, but its marketing as folklore could lead to a perception of the art as a residual form of popular culture, not something to be adopted by younger generations in the developed Southeast. Bimba's and Pastinha's contributions therefore ran the risk of being constrained by the increasingly marginal position Bahia occupied within the Brazilian economy.

### From regional to national: the spread throughout Brazil, 1950s–1970s

Despite these factors, from the 1950s onwards the practice of the Bahian styles of capoeira expanded enormously throughout Brazil. M.Bimba, Pastinha, their respective students and some other Bahians played a major role in this process. Yet Bahian styles did not 'conquer deserts', but met with existing traditions of capoeira, Afro-Brazilian music and games in cities like Rio de Janeiro or Recife. The impact of these traditions is subject to heated debates, where regional perspectives tend to underline the importance of local input. Since capoeira spread through many channels, no straightforward account is possible and I apologize for inevitable omissions of people and groups.

### *Cariocan capoeira*

In Rio de Janeiro, for instance, the capoeira that survived early Republican repression could be found in several modalities and contexts. First, there was the functional capoeira of Burlamaqui and Sinhozinho, which consisted of a fighting technique used in ring contests (see [Chapter 5](#)). Second, a more playful variant associated with *samba* and *batuque* was practised in shanty towns and popular neighbourhoods (see [Chapter 3](#)). And finally some tough guys or *malandros*, the remnants of the old capoeira gangs, still used capoeira as a tool in their everyday conflicts, especially in the red light district of Lapa. Prominent among them was Madame Satã, a transvestite reputed to have given beatings to three or more police officers at the same time, whose war name derived from his/her habit of parading in the costume of a female devil during carnival. This gay capoeira precursor died around 1968.<sup>1</sup>

The existence of these different modalities certainly made Cariocans more receptive to the capoeira from Bahia. Thus, when Bimba's group was planning a visit to Rio in 1948, the *Diários Associados* published an article under the title 'João Mina wants to see the *moleque* Bimba playing good capoeira', which reported extensively about the *batuque* and the capoeira still practised in the Morro da Favela slum.<sup>2</sup> The Bahian

styles of capoeira—Regional and Angola—arrived in Rio mainly through the participation of Bahians in free style competitions or through capoeira exhibitions marketed as folklore. If both types of performances contributed towards capoeira from Bahia becoming known to wider audiences, it was not enough to guarantee its spread as a practice. This situation only changed with the arrival of Bahian migrants, who started teaching capoeira on a regular basis, among thousands who left the Northeast and came to the Southeast of Brazil in search of jobs and a better standard of living. Among the first who came to stay was the angoleiro Joel Lourenço do Espírito Santo, who settled in Madureira, where he married the daughter of the vice-president of the famous Portela samba school. His father-in-law Antenor dos Santos became a firm supporter of capoeira, which was associated, once again, with samba. According to one report, Joel was the leader of 20 or 30 *capoeiristas* from Bahia living in Rio in 1953, and organized performances to demonstrate Bahian *vadição*.<sup>3</sup>

During the 1950s and 1960s many more Bahian *capoeiras* came to Rio, such as M.Pitu (Roque Mendes dos Santos), Mário Santos and Djalma Bandeira. Artur Emídio de Oliveira (c. 1930–) from Southern Bahia, a region famous for its cacao plantations, stood out among them because of his crucial influence on contemporary capoeira. He spent his youth in Itabuna, the capital of the cacao zone, where he practised different martial arts and learned capoeira from M.Paizinbo (Teodoro Ramos).<sup>4</sup> Because his native region, the former captaincy of Porto Seguro, constituted an area fairly distinct from the Bay of All The Saints, it is possible that Paizinbo's capoeira was quite different from the styles practised in Salvador and the Recôncavo.

From 1948 onwards Artur Emídio participated in different prize matches in São Paulo. He was widely acclaimed in 1951, when he won against Edgard Duro in what newspapers called a 'sensational match of capoeira against free style'.<sup>5</sup> In 1953, Valdemar Santana, a famous free-style fighter in Rio de Janeiro, invited him for a series of prize matches. Artur Emídio lost against Rudolfo Hermann, a student of Sinhôzinho but won a range of other fights, and also faced some of Carlos Gracie's *ju-jitsu* students in the ring. At that stage Artur Emídio, just like Bimba 20 years earlier, became involved in an argument over the rules of these contests: the Gracie brothers required him to put on a kimono in the ring.<sup>6</sup>

One of the reasons why Artur Emídio had such an impact is that although being a fighter in the ring he still stuck to capoeira with music, songs and rituals in his everyday practice. Alongside his combat performances, which relied on the use of a wide range of martial arts, he exhibited capoeira for a public more interested in folklore and exotic rituals. At the same time he started teaching capoeira, originally opening an academy in the beach district of Copacabana, which was not very successful. He then taught in the northern zone of the city, in the neighbourhood of Bonsucesso. By this time his academy became 'a kind of headquarter of capoeira' in the city.<sup>7</sup> According to M.Gato, he became the most famous *capoeirista* in Rio de Janeiro at the time thanks to 'his showy style, with jumps and spectacular kicks'.<sup>8</sup>

Most of the capoeira *mestres* that emerged during the 1960s—Leopoldina, Paulo Gomes, Celso do Engenho da Rainha and Djalma Bandeira—were his students. Some of them started to teach on their own, and in 1963, at least a dozen 'academies' were operating in Rio de Janeiro, almost all of them in the northern zone. Artur Emídio was acclaimed as 'one of the best *capoeiristas* in the country, and in Rio, its greatest promoter'.<sup>9</sup> Although he was not a direct pupil of Bimba, he contributed to the spread of a capoeira style that was in many respects—in the dominant use of fast rhythms, for instance—close to Regional. Yet in contrast to Bimba and his students, Artur Emídio did not make systematic use of long 'sequences' of movements.<sup>10</sup>

Artur Emídio also taught capoeira in the armed forces, thus contributing to the realization of the Brazilian nationalists' dream since the beginning of the century (see [Chapter 1](#)). The key figure, who made the recruits sweat with syncopated *ginga* instead of martial drill, was Lieutenant Lamartine Pereira da Costa.



This navy officer took a degree at the School of Physical Education of the Army and became the chief instructor of the Centre of Physical Education of the Navy (CEM), both in Rio de Janeiro. After training for two years with Artur Emídio, Lamartine felt confident enough to launch, with official support, a programme of capoeira instruction for marines. Two hundred soldiers and eight officers, including the CEM Commander and the CEM *ju-jitsu* instructor, started to train in March 1961 under the orders of Artur Emídio, Djalma Bandeira and Lamartine, thus 're-establishing the moral of capoeira as a national fight modality'. The plan was to train capoeira instructors, who would then teach capoeira in all navy units, and in particular to the marines serving on the aircraft carrier *Minas Gerais*, symbol of Brazil's modern military power.

Lamartine had previously spent two months in Bahia researching capoeira, where he trained with a student of Bimba. He also tried to learn from Bimba and other reputed angoleiro *mestres*, but his interest in the art was met with suspicion. Lamartine declared that the great *capoeiras* were mystery-mongers who did not want to teach their kicks. He admitted to have falsely befriended them and concealed his real intentions in order to extract information from the old *mestres*. In return, they filled his head with the most fantastic tales, which they made up on the spot. One can detect here a pattern that was to become quite common in subsequent years: young fellows from the cities of the Southeast travelling to Bahia in order to extract all the mysteries of the art from old *mestres*, mainly for their own, or their group's benefit. Lamartine subsequently published a capoeira handbook, with detailed instructions for training in capoeira on its own. It was reprinted many times under the suggestive title 'Capoeira without a master'.<sup>11</sup>

The repeated capoeira exhibitions and the dissemination of capoeira 'academies' in Rio started to have an impact. During the early 1960s capoeira had already conquered a significant public space, and since Rio still was, for all practical purposes, the capital of Brazil, this had national repercussions. A small group of people started what they called 'Operation Capoeira', a concerted attempt to raise public awareness of capoeira. The capoeira teacher André Lacé was responsible for a radio programme called 'Roda de Capoeira'. Broadcast by the state-owned Radio Roquette Pinto, in 1965 and again in 1974, it promoted both the art and the capoeira events that were happening in the city. At this stage film directors and musicians also became interested in capoeira, Wanda Maria recording the 'Samba do berimbau' and Ed Lincoln 'Na onda do berimbau'. The emerging Bossa Nova movement contributed the inspiring hit 'Berimbau', composed by Baden Powell and Vinicius de Moraes. Capoeira scenes figured prominently in movies such as *Pagador de promessas* (1962, directed by Anselmo Duarte) and further contributed to making the performers (M.Canjiquinha, Pitu) known to a wider public.<sup>12</sup>

Capoeira also spread more informally through street practice, especially in the poorer neighbourhoods in the Northern Zone. Paradigmatic of that process is the street *roda* in Caxias. It was originally set up for a festival dedicated to St Anthony by two young brothers who were training with M.Barbosa (student of Paulo Gomes) during the early 1970s, and then established as a regular event on Sundays. At first only poor children played, their intention being to enjoy capoeira whilst earning some spare change from the audience, and the established *mestres* did not bother to attend and legitimize the venue with their presence. Yet the *roda* attracted a growing number of youngsters and developed into a major event where the upcoming stars of Cariocan capoeira could measure their skills (see Figure 7.1). Despite voicing criticisms, younger *mestres* such as Gegê, Silas and Touro ended up attending, especially during the festival. Later M.Russo and Rogério assumed the direction of the Caxias *roda*.<sup>13</sup> Other important street *rodas* were regularly held at the Quinta da Boa Vista, the central train station and in Flamengo.<sup>14</sup>

Whilst the capoeira of Artur Emídio and other Bahians was expanding in the northern zone of Rio, another success story took place in the more elegant neighbourhoods along the waterfront, known as the southern zone. After a trip to Bahia in 1964, where they trained with M.Bimba for some months, the urban



Figure 7.1 Street Roda in Caxias, Rio de Janeiro, 1970s. Courtesy of FICA (International Capoeira Angola Federation), Washington, DC.

professional and *fazendeiro* (owner of a large estate) Rafael Flores and his brother Paulo decided to resume capoeira exercises on the veranda of their penthouse flat in Laranjeiras. Soon a bunch of adolescents, among them their younger brother Gilberto, Peixinho, and Cláudio Danadinho were also training. With the exception of Garrincha and Sorriso, two *moleques* from the nearby shanty town of Morro de Santa Marta, they were all middle-class and white, most of them with academic backgrounds. Only Gato (Fernando Cavalcanti) and Gil Velho had practised capoeira before and had had some contact with the students of Sinhôzinho in Leblon. The group called itself Senzala (slave hut).<sup>15</sup> They did not have a specific *mestre* to teach them on a regular basis, but tried to build on what Bimba had taught the Flores brothers and to learn from each other. M.Nestor Capoeira, who joined the Senzala in 1968, characterized their training style as follows:

The kids from Senzala—beyond Bimba’s sequence and the ‘despised waist’—introduced trainings based on the exhaustive and methodological repetition of kicks using the extended hand of their partner as a target; systematic trainings of kick-counterattack and kick-fall carried out by pairs; adapted trainings observed at Oriental martial arts schools; and instituted rather hard warm up exercises before the trainings [...As a result, they developed] an excellent physical condition; a technique of rapid attacks, precise and powerful, but without the malice of the *esquiva* and the *rasteira*, and completely alien to the philosophical foundations of the game.<sup>16</sup>

When the show ‘Vem Camará’, featuring Bimba’s best students, came to Rio in 1966, they met the Senzala group. Camisa Roxa even took over some training sessions on Flores’ veranda. When the Bahians returned to Salvador, one of the younger members, Preguiça (Wanden kolk Manuel de Oliveira) stayed behind to train with the Senzala. In that year the group also had its first public performance at the club ‘Germânia’. Baiano Anzol, another student of Bimba, also moved to Rio in 1968 and trained with Senzala.<sup>17</sup> Senzala then participated in the recently created capoeira tournament ‘Berimbau de Ouro’, where each school was judged according to criteria such as the rhythm and the game. To their own surprise, Gato and Preguiça won the cup in 1967, and Senzala also reaped victory in the two subsequent years. These victories contributed to



Figure 7.2 Itamar and Mestre Gato from Senzala, Buzios (Rio de Janeiro), 1970s. Photo by Pimpa (Maria Beatriz Albuquerque).

making the group known to wider audiences. Soon Senzala became a model for many teachers and groups, who started to take over its training methods, graduation system, organization and style (see Figure 7.2).

Realizing that their enthusiasm for capoeira was not enough to make up for their ignorance of the ‘foundations’ of the art as practised in Bahia, many of the committed Senzala members subsequently spent more time in Salvador, visiting and training in different academies, and even participating in the most traditional Angola *rodas*. As M.Gato emphasizes, back in Rio they then tried to pass on their experience to their younger students. During the early 1970s, visits from Bimba’s most renowned students to the Senzala *rodas* also became a regular feature.<sup>18</sup> Again a number of Bahian *capoeiristas* ended up moving to Rio in the 1970s, attracted by the far greater possibilities the city seemed to offer for the development of the art. Among them were Peito Pelado, Baianinho da Massaranduba and Dentinho, who all influenced the way younger Cariocans played capoeira.<sup>19</sup> Camisa Roxa’s younger brother José Tadeu Cardoso (M. Camisa, then still called Camisinha) arrived in 1972 and soon became a leading figure in the Senzala group (see Figure 7.3).<sup>20</sup>

Yet despite these multiple links to Bahia, and in particular Bimba’s Regional, the capoeira from Senzala remained a somewhat distinct style. M.Gato highlights how unbalancing techniques (*rasteiras*) and throws—not much used in Rio at the time—were central to training in the Senzala academies.<sup>21</sup> According to André Lacé, one of its early critics, the hallmarks of the Senzala style were a ‘good-looking *ginga* (white aesthetics), but inclining towards a not very creative standardization, a high foot making the *rasteira* prohibitive, the game (maybe unconsciously) planned in advance, the elimination (prejudice) of the *agogô*...’. Lacé recognized that ‘they were looking for new paths’, but reprimanded that

the *ginga* continually over-emphasized (‘*marcada*’), the rhythm hurried and *samba*-like. Many of them think that to play capoeira Angola is to play the Regional slowly and on the ground. It isn’t.<sup>22</sup>

Why was Senzala so immensely successful, even more than some schools created by famous Bahian teachers who were at the time settling in the cities of the Southeast? Nestor Capoeira asserts that by being middle class Senzala was clearly favoured; for instance, they had much easier access to the media than

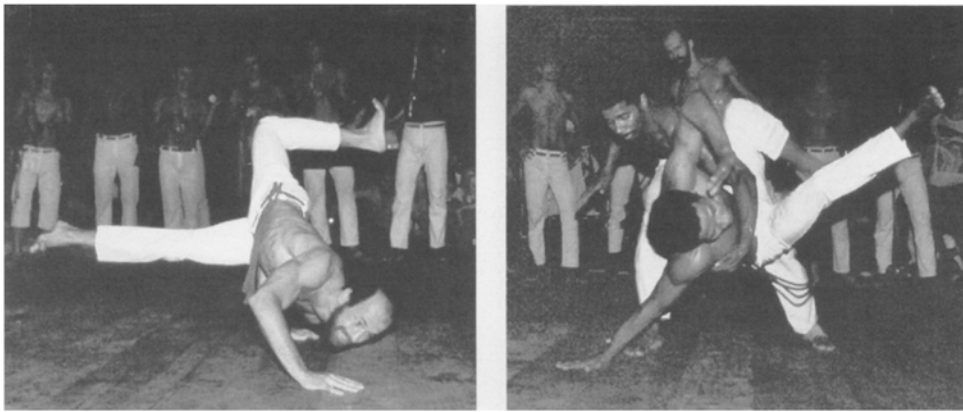


Figure 7.3 Mestre Camisa (left); a throw in contemporary capoeira (right), the Senzala group, Rio de Janeiro, 1980. Photos by Sidney Waismann.

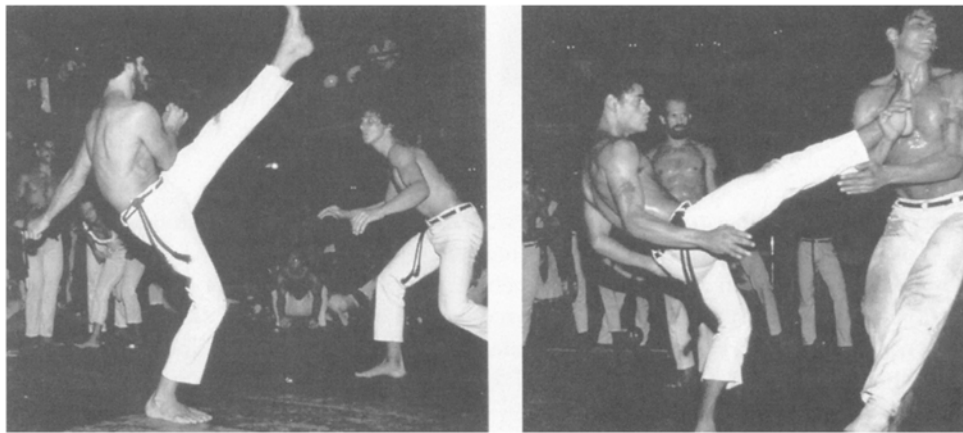


Figure 7.4 High kicks were a hallmark of Senzala group (left); full contact in contemporary capoeira (right), Senzala Group, Rio de Janeiro, 1980. Photos by Sidney Waismann.

poor, black teachers. He also suggests that, in Rio, with its multiple previous traditions of capoeira—in contrast to other regions of Brazil—‘the bed was already made’ for capoeira and Senzala to expand in the astonishing way it did.<sup>23</sup> Soon the group became too large to accommodate everybody. In 1974, Senzala fragmented into individual academies directed by the senior teachers who had been awarded the red belt, but they still maintained an overall link between each group. A number of important figures subsequently left Senzala to create their own organizations: M.Camisa established Abadá, M.Boneco, Paulão and Paulinho Sabiá founded Capoeira Brasil, and M.Jelon Vieira created his group in the United States (see Figure 7.5).<sup>24</sup>

### *Capoeira in São Paulo*

Some sources suggest that capoeira might already have existed in nineteenth-century São Paulo, since municipal laws outlawed its practice (see Chapter 3). During the wave of repression of the 1890s, a group

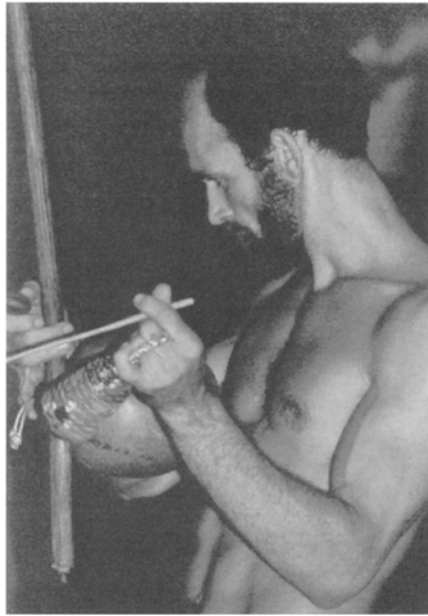


Figure 7.5 Mestre Camisa, then with the Senzala group, Rio de Janeiro, 1980, Photo by Sidney Waismann.

of *capoeiras* from Rio were exiled to Botucatu, then the end of the railway line and the civilized world in the province of São Paulo. Yet no capoeira had survived in the city of São Paulo by 1948, when a group of Bimba's students (Damião, Garrido and Perez) came from Bahia to demonstrate the art. According to one of them, the reaction of the public was 'fantastic. A great receptivity. A true apotheosis, to see this audience go wild with our fights! The Pacaembu stadium full! These were great exhibitions.' The businessman Jacob Naum, owner of the trendy bar 'Juca Pato' in the central Avenida São João, then arranged for *mestre* Bimba himself to come, in 1949, with another five of his students. 'Bimba's kids', as they were called, staged capoeira exhibitions but also took part in two free style prize matches where they confronted the best Paulista champions.<sup>25</sup> As André Lacé has highlighted, the outcome of most of these matches was pre-arranged in order to make the exhibition more spectacular.<sup>26</sup>

A year later, Esdras dos Santos (M.Damiao), who came to São Paulo for his training as an air force officer, taught capoeira to a group of around 50 students, but had to stop due to his transfer to Guaratingueta, in 1951. M.Damião was also responsible for the first capoeira exhibition and interview on television (TV Tupi), in 1955.<sup>27</sup> During the 1950s, the journalist Augusto Mário Ferreira (Guga), who had taken classes in Salvador and been awarded the 'graduate' certificate by Bimba, maintained some practice and instruction in the city. Yet it was only when another Bahian, José de Freitas, arrived at the end of the 1950s that regular teaching of capoeira resumed. He taught in the Brás neighbourhood and at the Sports Centre of the City Transports (CMTC). Valdemar Angoleiro was another precursor who set up a capoeira group, even though he was not a recognized *mestre*. At the time São Paulo, even more than Rio de Janeiro, attracted thousands of migrants from the impoverished Northeast. According to Almir das Areias, most of the *capoeiristas* among them did not bother with the art in the first instance. Yet when the migrants met on Sundays, in their homes or in public squares, joining a spontaneous *roda* became part of their way of celebrating their distant homeland.<sup>28</sup> This is how the now traditional street *roda* on the Praça da República started.<sup>29</sup>



Many only played capoeira in their free time, but some discovered that capoeira could also become a means to supplement their income or even to earn their living. The first capoeira classes took place in some martial arts venues, such as the boxing academy of Kid Jofre, father of the world champion in the two lightest categories, Eder Jofre. A group of Bahians *mestres* who settled during the 1960s in São Paulo constituted the core of the pioneers that implanted regular capoeira practice in the city: Suassuna, Brasília, Joel, Gilvan, Paulo Limão, Silvestre, Ananias, and, during the 1970s, Airtton Onça and Acordeon. Some had been pupils of the famous angoleiros Canjiquinha (Brasília, Ananias) or Caiçara (Paulo Limão, Silvestre), while others had gone through the Regional school of Bimba (Airtton Moura, Acordeon).<sup>30</sup> Suassuna came from Southern Bahia, where he had learned both Angola (with M.Sururu) and Regional from two of Bimba's students who were teaching in Itabuna.<sup>31</sup> He also had spent some time at Bimba's academy in Salvador before coming to São Paulo.<sup>32</sup> From Rio came Waldemar Paulista and Paulo Gomes. Gomes was originally from Bahia but became a student of Artur Emídio whilst living in Rio. Initially, setting up a regular capoeira academy in a city where many other martial arts attempted to woo students was no easy business. M.Ousado, who learned capoeira in São Paulo during the 1970s, remembers: 'These great *mestres* suffered a lot. We kept hoping for visitors to come, and when one appeared, he was treated like God'.<sup>33</sup> By 1970 these *mestres* were teaching in nine academies distributed throughout the metropolis that, according to its own slogan, could 'not stop growing'.<sup>34</sup>

The difficulties the Bahians faced in the industrial metropolis contributed towards taking the edge off the conflicts between Regional and Angola that were dividing *capoeiristas* in Salvador. Their identity as migrants—Northeasterners, especially Bahians were often discriminated in São Paulo—overruled earlier divisions. As Letícia Reis has observed, all tried to recreate the atmosphere of their homeland Bahia in their academies. The *mestres* gave their groups names such as Island of Itaparica, Viva Bahia, Mandinga Baiana, Ladeira do Pelourinho, and Legends of Abaeté. They pinned pictures of Salvador and their Bahian *mestres* on the walls of their academies.<sup>35</sup> M.Suassuna, formed by Regional and M.Brasília, a student of Canjiquinha, joined efforts in the group 'Cordão de Ouro' (golden chain, a reference to the famous Besouro Mangangá, see Chapter 4), which became one of the most successful capoeira associations in the country. Suassuna recorded a series of capoeira LPs that tapped the emerging market and to the sound of which a whole generation of *capoeiristas* throughout the country trained during the 1970s and 1980s. He also provided assistance to many young Bahians who came to the metropolis—to the point that his house was called the 'Northeastern Consulate'.

In terms of style, the capoeira from São Paulo soon acquired its own characteristics. According to M.Brasília, one of its most prominent representatives:

Neither the Angola nor the Regional succeeded [in São Paulo]. Some *mestres* played Angola (Limão, Silvestre and I) and others Regional (Ayrton, Suassuna, and Paulo Gomes). The outcome was a different capoeira, which is not one thing, nor the other. It became different.<sup>36</sup>

Soon a second generation of native *mestres* emerged: Dejamir Pinatti, who wholeheartedly changed from *karate* to capoeira, Valdenor, Gladson, Zé Pereira, Tarzã and Corrisco.<sup>37</sup> They, and further migrants from Southern Bahia such as M.Almir, Miguel and Kenura, started to teach and set up their own groups. M.Gladson introduced capoeira at the University of São Paulo and during the 1970s the first academies opened in the interior of the province.

As in Rio de Janeiro, capoeira started to make significant inroads into the young, educated middle class. During the late 1960s, capoeira came to represent Brazilian authenticity for a whole generation of students at the USP, at least those who sympathized with the left. Their icon Geraldo Vandré, author of the song that

became the 1968 rebel hymn of the left ('Para não dizer que não falei de flores'), also wrote a song about how 'capoeira was going to fight' ('Capoeira vai lutar').<sup>38</sup>

After the harsh repression of the student movement in 1968, the military again turned to capoeira. As part of their attempts to eradicate dissent and control civil society, the military regime not only promoted the transformation of capoeira into the national gymnastics, but also wanted to have a hold over the multiplying capoeira groups. Some attempts at institutionalization had resulted, even before the military coup, in the creation of a Department of the 'Brazilian National Fight' (e.g. capoeira) within the Cariocan Federation of Boxing (Federação Carioca de Pugilismo) in 1962.<sup>39</sup> In August 1968 the Federation organized the 'First Symposium on Capoeira', which was attended by sports and capoeira teachers from Rio, as well as minister João Lira Filho. The aim of the organizers was to reach a consensus about the regulations that should govern the art and eventually unify the conflicting styles. Most interventions (in particular those of Captain Lamartine and Dr Decanio) advocated that capoeira should be administrated as a sport and not as folklore. A few dissident voices (including that of João Lira) maintained that it should remain 'folklore'. However, as André Lacé revealed to the press, most capoeira teachers were unhappy that they had to affiliate to a boxing federation, whose budget they did not control, and aspired to create a federation of their own.<sup>40</sup> Since the meeting reached no conclusion, the Brazilian Air Force sponsored a 'Second Symposium on Capoeira', organized by Fersen Braga, who managed to make more than 50 *mestres* and instructors from different states attend. Yet the most prominent participant, *mestre* Bimba, walked out in the middle of the event because he felt that people who had no adequate knowledge were appropriating his art.<sup>41</sup>

At the time the military regime encouraged its higher rank officers to take over leading functions within civil society, and in particular within the sports federations and its umbrella organization, the National Council of Sports (Conselho Nacional de Desportos—CND). Further meetings and pressure finally led to the adoption of 'Technical Rules of Capoeira' by the Brazilian Boxing Confederation in 1972.<sup>42</sup> It laid down precise regulations regarding recognized kicks, ethics, uniforms, competitions, and judges and standardized the level of students. The latter were to be identified by belts (*cordões*) inspired by the colours of the Brazilian flag: white, green, yellow and blue. Capoeira federations in every state subsequently adopted similar regulations.<sup>43</sup>

Crucial to the development of and the directions taken by the art since the 1970s was the foundation of the Federação Paulista de Capoeira, in 1974. Most of the prominent *mestres* of the first and second generation in São Paulo (M. Onça, Suassuna, Brasília, Pinatti, etc.) adhered to the new institution, expecting that it would provide them with crucial support in their everyday struggle to maintain their academies. If the Federation fulfilled that function, it also contributed to streamlining capoeira in São Paulo, and reinforced the trend to transform it into a competitive sport modality. The yearly tournaments organized by the Federation were paramount in that development. Like athletes, capoeiristas paraded around the stadium in their impeccable white uniforms exhibiting the logos of their respective group. They saluted the Brazilian and São Paulo flags with the Regional greeting 'Salve!' Games took place within weight, age and gender categories analogous to boxing. Judges ranked the competitors according to the number of successful attacks and counterattacks, a *rasteira* or a *tesoura*, for instance, being awarded two points. Contenders also lost points if they fell to the ground or left the delimited area of competition. The whistle of the judge, not the *berimbau*, signalled the beginning of the game. Athletes typically displayed fast sequences of kicks and did not make much use of *ginga*.<sup>44</sup>

Initially, most movements were allowed (with the exception of blows), but when head butts (*cabeçadas*) resulted in accidents, they were banned. The games became increasingly regulated, at a later stage competitors having to perform specific movements or lose points. Without doubt, the competitions



contributed to making capoeira grow in São Paulo. 'There were people who did not like them, but they happened'.<sup>45</sup> Even later critics, such as M. Miguel (Miguel Machado), initially took part in them.

The Federation not only contributed to the establishment of capoeira as a sport modality, but also played an important part in institutionalizing it as the Brazilian gymnastics. In other words, it realized to a large extent the dream dear to the military, of the 'redemption' of capoeira and its use as a school of citizenship. The Federation decided, for instance, that all affiliated groups had to use the 'Salve!' before or after classes and that a Brazilian flag had to be displayed in each academy. In contrast, spontaneous and open *rodas* or 'folkloric exhibitions' after the tournament were forbidden.<sup>46</sup>

The very growth of capoeira in São Paulo also contributed to the intensification of conflicts between groups. According to M.Almir,

The competition between the academies for the conquest of the market, became constant. The violence among *capoeiristas* became a ritual. Slowly, and almost completely, capoeira ceased to be a festival, an expression, and the *capoeirista*, an artist, became a mere competitor, a merchant, or a sheer provider of services, where the capoeira turned into a simple commodity for the consumption of violence. In this context, the *capoeiristas*, again, found themselves divided and isolated, and their relationship with capoeira gradually ceased to be one of pleasure to become only a relation of power and the obligation to earn their survival.<sup>47</sup>

Almir das Areias, a student of M.Suassuna, was part of a group of younger *mestres* from the 'second generation', most of them originally from Bahia, who developed their own groups maintaining a critical distance from the São Paulo Federation. He was the co-founder of the group *Capitães de Areia* (Captains of the Sand), named after the novel of Jorge Amado about street children in Salvador. Whereas the teachers linked to the Federation worked hard to make capoeira respectable and have it recognized as the Brazilian martial art, the Captains of the Sand rather attempted to unite the 'oppressed *capoeiristas*' for the struggle against the system. For them, capoeira constituted one of the instruments of liberation for the Brazilian working class.<sup>48</sup> It was therefore important to emphasize that capoeira was an art, not a sport, and that it was part of the cultural traditions of the Brazilian blacks. As a consequence, the Captains rejected the belt system adopted by the Federation, which was inspired by oriental martial arts and derived from the Brazilian national colours. They invented a graduation system based on the successive stages a slave had to go through until achieving freedom: slave (chain), maroon (rope), freedman (silk scarf) and Captain of the Sand (pieces from all three previous stages). That reflected the Captains' view that the practice of capoeira fostered a process of social and political awareness. At the last stage, the *capoeirista* had acquired all the skills to survive in his oppressive environment.

In the repressive atmosphere of the military dictatorship, the Captains of the Sand offered a space for 'cultural resistance' and attracted support from a range of artists and intellectuals. The Captains' headquarters became a venue for popular culture, where shows with folkloric groups from the Northeast and concerts with Brazilian pop musicians (MPB) took place. M. Almir was invited to act in a TV soap opera and to write about his experience. The psychiatrist Roberto Freire worked with him to integrate capoeira in his therapy method called soma-therapy. The Captains demonstrated how capoeira could be adapted to new contexts without necessarily making it a sport that fitted neatly into the political mainstream or the military project.<sup>49</sup>

Cativeiro (bondage, slavery) was another group that provided alternatives to the capoeira style and modality propagated by the Paulista Federation. Founded by six *mestres* (all of them migrants from Southern Bahia and five of them M.Suassuna's pupils) towards the end of the 1970s, the group expanded

significantly during the 1980s. Prominent among them was M.Miguel, who after training with thousands of consecutive kicks in his youth, started to realize that 'in capoeira there is no direct confrontation'.<sup>50</sup>

The founders of Cataveiro shared with the Captains of the Sand the critical assessment of the 'martial' capoeira of the Federation, and equally refused to become an 'academy'. Yet instead of class they racialized their discourse: 'Capoeira has to be understood as a form of expression of a race'. They wanted to reaffirm the black origins of capoeira, which was, according to them, being lost in the process of 'sportification'. They considered the art to be intimately linked to *candomblé* and as a consequence adopted a graduation system where the colour of each belt stood for specific *orixás*: green for Oxóssi, brown for Omulu, yellow for Oxum, purple for Xangô, blue for Iemanjá, red for Ogum, and the highest graduation, white, for Oxalá.

This attempt to sacralize and re-africanize capoeira occurred in parallel to the development of a new black movement in São Paulo and other cities. The Unified Black Movement (Movimento Negro Unificado—MNU), for instance, was founded in 1978, the same year as Cataveiro. Cataveiro's overall philosophy thus fitted into that new trend which re-asserted not only the importance of the Afro-Brazilian heritage but also attempted to re-africanize popular practices, from carnival groups such as the *blocos afro* to Afro-Brazilian cults. *Umbanda*, the most syncretic and popular of Afro-Brazilian religions, also went through a process of 're-africanization' during the 1980s.

Letícia Reis asserts that Cataveiro insisted more on the individual struggle to raise consciousness than advocate collective social and political transformations. She also drew attention to the fact that most of the colours adopted by Cataveiro coincided with the belts of the Federation, even though they were supposed to carry a different meaning, and that this led to confusion among practitioners. In 1985 M.Miguel moved to Salvador in order to learn more about the traditions of capoeira from the old *mestres*, and to pass on those teachings to the different Cataveiro nuclei in São Paulo. Since Bahia still represented, for capoeira as well as for *candomblé*, the recognized source of authentic tradition, this experience provided him with a new source of legitimacy, both in São Paulo and beyond.<sup>51</sup> The style of the group changed accordingly, re-africanization meaning, as in most other cases, a re-introduction of aspects identified with the Angola style, which were considered more authentic and nearer to African traditions. This matched the change of attitudes in the greatest Brazilian city and contributed, among other reasons, to the growth of the group. By the end of the 1990s, Cataveiro had more than 100 teachers and *mestres* spread over seven states and nine countries.<sup>52</sup> It also joined the Brazilian Confederation of Capoeira (CBC).

### *Other states and new constituencies*

Capoeira practice spread throughout Brazil during the 1970s and 1980s, reaching all the states of the union, and conquering the vast interior. Today capoeira is taught in every Brazilian city, as well as in smaller towns and hamlets. The history of this expansion still remains to be written, and what follows is no more than a cursory attempt to provide readers with an idea of the dynamics. In every state or city contemporary teachers usually trace their genealogy to the pioneers who have introduced the art. The latter might not have necessarily been the first to practise capoeira or to perform in public, but they were the ones who opened academies and taught a first generation of students until they became teachers or *mestres* themselves. Thus capoeira in Brasília, for example, owes much to Hélio Tabosa, who started teaching there in the 1960s, M.Zulu (Antonio Batista Pinto), Adilson, Barto, Pombo de Ouro and Chibata.<sup>53</sup>

In other states where local traditions of capoeira existed, such as Pará, Maranhão and Pernambuco, it is still unclear how many of these previous practices were incorporated into contemporary styles.<sup>54</sup> In São Luís, for example, some form of rough street capoeira seems to have survived well into the twentieth century. Oral history records not much more than the names of 'tough guys' such as Luciel or Caranguejo

and some of their exploits.<sup>55</sup> Things changed when M.Canjiquinha came, in 1966, with his group Aberrê (Brasília, Careca and Sapo) for public exhibitions in São Luís and Bacabal. The governor José Sarney appreciated their performance at the palace so much that he invited Sapo to teach capoeira in Maranhão. Thus M.Sapo (Anselmo Barnabé Rodrigues) moved to São Luís where he taught until his premature death, in 1982. Also a boxer, he taught a rather functional capoeira interested in efficiency, but still maintained some of the capoeira traditions. He always asserted that he had brought capoeira to Maranhão, and he certainly did introduce a method to teach it. Most contemporary teachers in Maranhão claim some kind of affiliation with M.Sapo, even though their style has significantly evolved since, and some groups have reverted to Angola. Today at least 30 capoeira groups exist in São Luís, and many more in the interior.

In the regions of Brazil where no local capoeira tradition existed, the art first spread through shows and public performances. Many *mestres* toured Southern Brazil with capoeira exhibitions, but few remained there to teach. For example, in Curitiba, capital of Paraná state, the first regular academies were only opened in the early 1970s by Vadinho and M. Eurípedes. Antônio Carlos de Menezes, better known as M.Burguês, learned capoeira in Rio de Janeiro with M.Paulão, a brother of M.Mintirinha. In 1975 he moved to Curitiba and established his group Muzenza there.<sup>56</sup> Despite initial difficulties—the cold, financial problems, prejudices against capoeira in a region where European culture is predominant—Muzenza expanded considerably over the next 25 years and became one of the biggest and well organized groups in Brazil, with regular encounters, its own newsletter, a website in six languages ([www.muzenza.com.br](http://www.muzenza.com.br)) and over a dozen records (LPs and CDs). In 1996, 23 *mestres*, 26 *contra-mestres*, 23 instructors, 51 monitors and 9 trainees worked for Muzenza mainly in the South, but also in Mato Grosso, Ceará, and abroad.<sup>57</sup>

The impressive growth of groups such as Muzenza demonstrates that capoeira could expand more easily in Brazilian regions with more developed economies (the Southeast and the South). Here more students could and can afford to pay for classes, and this in turn induced their teachers to become capoeira professionals. The career of capoeira teachers thus became more attractive, especially for black and/or poor males without formal education. If in cities like Salvador, capoeira became an ‘ethnic profession’,<sup>58</sup> that link is no longer automatic in the Southeast. On the contrary, some of the major groups here were led by *mestres* considered white.

The integration of capoeira into the market economy has had a profound impact on the art, affecting style and meaning, and the relationships between students, teachers and *mestres*. Professional instructors compete for market shares against each other, but they also need to build alliances in order to increase their expertise, or to hold events that have financial returns, such as exhibitions and graduations. Since teaching capoeira has become a recognized profession, it has attracted an increasing number of young males, especially from lower-class backgrounds and without formal education. For them capoeira is a means of survival, not any longer in the street, but in the market economy. It comes therefore as no surprise that many want to shorten as much as possible the long apprenticeship with a *mestre*, in order to earn money as quickly as possible. Thus a number of them start to teach with only a couple of years’ practice, and some auto-graduate themselves as *mestres*. This is obviously unacceptable for the older *mestres*. These are often surprised to find that almost every advanced student in a capoeira event considers himself to be a *mestre*.<sup>59</sup>

The inflation of autoproclaimed *mestres* is difficult to stop due to the lack of one recognized umbrella organization for capoeira. One way to confirm the value of a teacher’s title is through his ‘genealogy’ or affiliation. In theory, every *mestre* should have been given that title by another *mestre*. If that is not the case, there are reasons to doubt its legitimacy. These auto-didacts constitute, as M.Camisa said, ‘Mestres who do not have a *mestre* to recognize them!’<sup>60</sup> In practice, however, this genealogical criteria is not always easy to uphold since many of the recognized *mestres* today were never granted formal diplomas either and would be at great pains if they were asked to produce them. Furthermore, most of the *mestres* who taught

them are long dead, and it is impossible to ask them if they did recognize their students as having the level of a *mestre*.<sup>61</sup> Equally important is the more informal peer recognition at events or street *rodas*; and occasionally some teachers are vetoed by some of the older *mestres* to participate in an event. As we have seen, the Brazilian state has tried to control the capoeira business through federations, but this was far from successful. In 1998, president Cardoso passed a new law that regulates the profession of physical education.<sup>62</sup> Under that law any professional needs a diploma in physical education in order to teach capoeira or any other physical activity, a recognition issued by the Federal Council of Physical Education and its regional outlets. An exception is made only for instructors able to prove they have been teaching for three years before the adoption of the law. Since this regulation will exclude many capoeira teachers without a formal diploma, this law and its enforcement have been the object of heated debates and a number of protests in recent years.

Two basic types of capoeira organizations emerged during the last four decades: groups and federations. One academy with a *mestre* or even a teacher can form an independent group; but usually groups consist of larger associations, where one *mestre* or a group of *mestres* and teachers maintain training venues in several locations. The federations, in return, aim to establish institutional links between groups. The federations', and more recently the Brazilian Confederation's, explicit aim was to 'organize' capoeira, providing guidelines and support for local groups and a framework for more encompassing events. Federations have been relatively successful in some states, in particular in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Yet even here many groups felt that this kind of umbrella organization was not helpful, and resented patronizing bureaucrats and political cooptation. Capoeira grew to its present size more through the groups than through federations. Given the growing national integration and the intensity of migrations within Brazil, most if not all groups important on a local level rapidly expanded to acquire a regional and national dimension, thus bypassing the federations.

Most groups develop a strong identity and expect their nuclei in other states to adhere and conform to their style, methods, and ideology, usually developed by a core of *mestres* and other 'organic' intellectuals. The style of each group provides easier models of identification than a federation, always perceived as state-owned and controlled. The groups also develop their own forms of administration, but compared to the bureaucracies of state-sponsored sports organizations, this is kept to a minimum, and they usually do not employ full-time administrators. Federations have always tried to embrace groups, and made them offers to join. Yet the divergence of opinions between participant groups and the inevitable power struggle for the direction of federations and the CBC have resulted in many groups refusing to join, or even leaving. A recent power struggle at CBC, for instance, even resulted in the respected M.Suassuna and Damião being expelled from its Council of *Mestres*.<sup>63</sup> Some *mestres* whose views did not prevail within a federation set up rival organizations. M.Paulo Gomes, for example, funded the ACAESP, later expanded into the Brazilian Capoeira Association (ABRACAP), in 1984.<sup>64</sup> Thus neither the federations nor the CBC managed to become the key institution of contemporary capoeira. As M.Luiz Renato stated: 'It is clear that the groups were the mode of organization that capoeira chose'.<sup>65</sup>

Yet relations between groups can become equally competitive, especially when they try to tap into the same segment of the market. Personal animosities—resentment because a teacher left one group to establish a rival one, for instance—is a further reason for acrimonious relations between groups. These sometimes become public when members of rival groups confront each other in 'open' *rodas* (that is, open to other groups as opposed to *rodas* reserved for group members) and provide some background for understanding the violence that occasionally occurs in this context.

Some groups have devised elaborate market strategies to foster their growth. For instance, they attempt to recruit teachers already working in areas where they want to expand. Or they try to convince reputed *mestres*

to affiliate, even though their style is quite different. A real competition has also developed with regard to the *old mestres*. They are invited to events, and courted by different means, in the hope that they will eventually become godfather of the group. The *old mestres* are perceived as important for the transmission of capoeira traditions. Here Bahia, with its dozens of *old capoeiras* over 60, still holds the hegemony over tradition, at least for the time being. They provide symbolic capital and attest a group's seriousness. Any organizer of a capoeira event will seek to have a number of well-known *mestres* attend. This has led to the emergence of a jet set of prestigious *mestres* who attend events all over the world.

Because of the decentralized growth it is difficult to give an estimate of the total number of practitioners. Official figures registered 874 teaching centres of capoeira in Greater São Paulo in 1996.<sup>66</sup> The membership of individual groups can vary from a couple of dozen students of one *mestre* or teacher to greater associations where several thousands students are taught by several *mestres*, spread over many locations and cities. The group Beribazu, for instance, created in 1972 by M.Zulu in Brasília, and now headed by a collective of *mestres*, counted 9 *mestres*, 10 *contra-mestres*, 16 instructors and 3,000 students in 1997.<sup>67</sup> Candeias de Capoeira, founded in 1991 and presided by M.Suino, with headquarters in the Goiás state, had 4 *mestres*, 8 *contra-mestres*, 59 other teachers and 5,000 affiliated students in 1999.<sup>68</sup> Capoeira Brasil, founded in 1989 by M.Sabiá, Paulão and Boneco, counted 8,000 members in Brazil alone a decade later.<sup>69</sup>

The growth of capoeira is so impressive because the art expanded not only geographically, in terms of class and 'colour', but also in terms of gender. As we have seen in [Chapter 4](#), capoeira has always been a male pastime. Women—although frequent spectators—only exceptionally played themselves. M.Pastinha was the first *mestre* to systematically encourage women to train with him, and many other teachers followed suit. Nevertheless, very few women started training in Bahia until the 1990s, while in Southeast Brazil, Western Europe and the United States an increasing number of women have joined capoeira groups; reflecting a more substantial change in gender relations than in Bahia.<sup>70</sup> Everywhere relationships with other male students or teachers have not always been easy, and women often struggled—and still struggle—to be accepted as equals. Now women training in capoeira is almost universally accepted. All contemporary capoeira groups include women, who constitute anything between 10 and 50 per cent of the membership.

The best female *capoeiristas* have now achieved a level that ranks them as equals among the steadily increasing number of *mestres*, even though they still remain a small minority at that level. For this reason female instructors play a crucial role as models for younger generations of *capoeiristas*. The first woman to become a *mestre* was Fátima Colombiana (M.Cigana), who graduated in 1980 under M.Canjiquinha. She has since taught capoeira to hundreds of students in São Paulo and Rio and become president of the Cariocan Federation of Capoeira. Even though she recognizes she still has to overcome male prejudice in her profession, her career illustrates what women can achieve in capoeira today.<sup>71</sup> Edna Lima, another female pioneer who became a *mestre* in 1981, at the age of 19, also holds a fourth-degree black belt in Shotokan *karate*. She now teaches in New York and has recently joined the group Abadá.<sup>72</sup> In Capoeira Angola a few women from Bahia—Janja, Jararaca and Paulinha—have also achieved *contra-mestre* status. These and other female teachers are usually well known beyond their respective groups. Capoeira magazines publish regular sections dedicated to women in capoeira, with reports and interviews with the emerging female stars of capoeira. Some female instructors insist that in their group women are respected and have equal rights.<sup>73</sup>

If on the one hand contemporary capoeira thus contributes to greater equality between sexes, on the other female bodies are still used on magazine covers to attract a still predominantly male readership or to advertise capoeira clothes.<sup>74</sup> Ongoing *machismo* from male *capoeiristas* remains a common complaint from female practitioners. Rather than solving gender issues, capoeira provides a space where these can be renegotiated, and here every group has its own idiosyncratic practice. Some groups, such as the International

Capoeira Angola Foundation, have events specially dedicated to women in capoeira and actively promote gender equality, whilst in other, more mainstream groups, the woman's role is still seen as subordinate. Some male *capoeiristas* still persist in considering that women are essentially there to relax the male warrior. In other words, although capoeira practice can contribute to a greater awareness of gender issues, it cannot change overnight patriarchal attitudes that have prevailed for centuries.

A further context in which the practice of capoeira has expanded enormously over the last years is in education. In fact capoeira has always been an educational tool, but it was restricted to a specific social and ethnic group and frowned upon by public opinion. Although writers, sportsmen and politicians underlined the potential of an 'improved' capoeira for educational use since the beginning of the twentieth century, it was only from the 1980s onwards that capoeira has been taught on a wide scale in schools as part of physical education or as an extra-curricular activity. Two pioneers in that respect were the Centres for Sports Initiation (CIDs) in Brasília and the Integrated Centres for Public Education (CIEPs) in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>75</sup> Today capoeira is taught in many in primary and secondary schools and institutions of further education.<sup>76</sup>

The extraordinary potential of capoeira to develop psychomotor skills has furthermore contributed to its use in the education of people with different kinds of learning disabilities. Therapists from Florianópolis to Nova Friburgo employ it to deal with visual deficiency,<sup>77</sup> while a whole branch of anarchist psychotherapy has integrated it into its holistic approach of healing. Patients following the soma-therapy are required to practise capoeira, considered 'bodily knowledge that is indispensable in the struggle against socially repressive mechanisms'. Its founder, Dr Roberto Freire, learned with M.Almir from the Captains of the Sand and began to encourage his patients to practise capoeira during the 1970s. Freire conducted a seminal interview with Pastinha before the old *mestre* passed away, and subsequently switched his soma-therapy towards the Angola style.<sup>78</sup> These examples illustrate to what extent capoeira has become a widely used tool in different methods and levels of education and therapy.

The incredible growth capoeira experienced in terms of 'race', class, gender, and geography has multiple, and sometimes contradictory implications. The widening of the social backgrounds of practitioners can mean that distances between the practice of each segment of the capoeira universe are increasing. Sonia Travassos for instance noted that among middle-class practitioners in Rio de Janeiro, capoeira appears as an isolated cultural good, whereas among lower-class students the art still is accompanied by other Afro-Brazilian manifestations such as *maculelê* or *samba de roda*. She also points out that in some middle-class contexts capoeira became part of a certain 'alternative' culture, which is reflected in the use of rather casual dress to train, whereas lower-class groups or those led by black teachers usually insist on the necessity of neat uniforms.<sup>79</sup> On the other side, through the expansion of capoeira at least some elements of Afro-Bahian culture are being given more public space and made known to larger audiences, an aspect often emphasized by Bimba's students Angelo Decanio and M.Itapoan.

The expansion of capoeira practice into such diverse contexts, and the development of different modalities to cater for widening objectives—from fighting efficiency in the ring to rehabilitation purposes in the therapy room—are not without an effect on the overall unity of the art. In other words, the very meaning of the practice can change according to the audience and the context. When *mestres* and teachers reflect upon the effects of the impressive growth of the art over the last three decades, they often comment that capoeira only 'swelled up' ('inchou') rather than expanding in quality. Uncontrolled growth is perceived to threaten the unity of the art. Yet the more *mestres* launch appeals to 'unite capoeira', the less this seems possible at present. In that context capoeira Angola, once again, seems to provide a model of how to grow while remaining true to tradition.



### The rebirth of Angola

The extinction of capoeira Angola was predicted many times. During the 1930s Edison Carneiro anticipated that capoeira Angola would ‘retreat towards the little hamlets of the coast’ and concluded that ‘sooner or later, progress will give it the coup de grace’.<sup>80</sup> The CECA, under M.Pastinha and other angoleiros engaged in the struggle for the preservation of the art, tried to reverse the trend during the 1940s and 1950s. The Brazilian press nonetheless often indulged in obituaries for capoeira Angola. Already in 1962 *A Tarde* wrote categorically—and inaccurately—that Angola ‘was no longer practised in the city of Salvador’.<sup>81</sup> When the Paulista magazine ‘Artes Marciais’, dedicated a special issue to capoeira in the 1980s, it presented the *tesoura* and *parada de angola* under the heading ‘movements no longer used’.<sup>82</sup>

Once Waldemar and Cobrinha Verde could no longer hold their traditional *rodas* and Pastinha had become blind, the continuation of the Angola style seemed, once more, under real threat. Pastinha’s pupils João Pequeno and João Grande, now *mestres* in their own right, continued instruction during the 1970s, but they were swimming against the mainstream. Since capoeira Angola could no longer guarantee his subsistence, João Grande stopped teaching it. He survived by working in a petrol station during the day and in a folklore show for tourists at night. The producers of the show only wanted him to play the *berimbau* and dance, not to show the movements of capoeira Angola—they thought tourists would be more interested in the flashier acrobatics of Regional.<sup>83</sup> In a country obsessed with modernization, Regional seemed the only way forward. Some of the remaining angoleiros started to make concessions to Regional, because they thought that was the only way they could compete with Regional teachers. M.Canjiquinha among others went down this line, and so did M.Bobó who took over Pastinha’s academy. Even M.João Pequeno started to hand out coloured belts to his students (this is considered a clear mark of being ‘Regional’ today). As we have seen, in Rio and São Paulo styles closer to Bimba’s Regional predominated, and most teachers stemming from an Angola tradition also sought to adapt their teaching to the emerging ‘mixed’ style. If Angola was not extinct, it was clearly on the defensive.

Things changed radically during the 1980s. The re-emergence of the Black Movement and the revaluation of the Afro-Brazilian heritage in Brazilian society, most visibly in popular music (the *blocos afro* in Bahia) and religion (‘re-Africanization’ of *umbanda* in the Southeast) provided the general framework that made a renaissance of Angola possible.<sup>84</sup> If capoeira Angola was to overcome the image of an art in extinction, only practised by elderly people, it still needed the dedicated engagement of a younger generation. Mestre Moraes (Pedro Moraes Trindade, 1950-) and the GCAP played a crucial role in this process. Moraes was born on the island of Maré in the Bay of All The Saints, one of those mythic places praised in capoeira songs, and was brought up in Salvador. At the age of eight a neighbour took him to the CECA, where he started to train under the direction of João Grande and João Pequeno. Moraes became a marine and was transferred to Rio de Janeiro in the early 1970s.<sup>85</sup> In 1974 he was already teaching capoeira Angola in the northern suburb of Belfort Roxo. He was also head of the group ‘Modá-Ruê’, which instructed Cariocans in ‘Northeastern folklore’ such as *maculelê*, *sambade roda*, *puxada de rede* and even ‘African lament’ (‘lamento africano’).<sup>86</sup> What distinguished Moraes from many other Bahians in Rio was that he insisted in playing Angola even when confronting other styles, be it the apprentice fighters of Artur Emídio or the fast guys from Senzala. His style struck *capoeiristas* as fundamentally different from anything they had seen so far.

According to M.Marco Aurélio, at the time a beginner who later became one of Moraes’ students, news spread that ‘an African was visiting the *rodas* of the city, who played a different capoeira’ [...] Visiting *capoeiristas* from Salvador often got kicked in the face when they tried to play a more ritualistic, playful game with the Cariocans mainly interested in efficiency. ‘The dominant idea asserted that Angola was like capoeira Regional, only played slower and on the ground, with *floreios*’. When Moraes played, he did not



indulge in sequences of high kicks, but always ‘entered’, be it from a low or high position, always according to the *jogo de dentro* (‘inner game’) of Angola. What also struck Marco Aurélio and many others was that Moraes went to *rodas* on his own, or only accompanied by his wife and a student, unlike the *capoeiristas* from Senzala or other groups who—knowing that fights were likely to happen—would only attend in larger numbers. Moraes not only skilfully evaded his opponents’ kicks but often even ‘demoralized the guy, he slapped the guy on his bottom’.<sup>87</sup> He even managed to stick to his style when playing with the emerging stars of Cariocan capoeira, such as M. Camisa, then part of the Senzala group. According to André Lacé, a game between Moraes and Camisa was among the best capoeira one could see in Rio at the time.<sup>88</sup> A number of Moraes’ students from that period later became *mestres* of Angola themselves, such as Neco, Lumumba, Braga, and Jurandir, to name only a few. They contributed to establishing the style, especially in the northern suburbs of Rio, and later to take capoeira Angola abroad.

In October 1980, M. Moraes, now working as a security guard for the underground, founded the Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho—GCAR.<sup>89</sup> The intention was to establish Capoeira Angola as a style on its own in the city, departing from the dominant model of blending traditional Bahian capoeira with Regional and other fighting techniques. Whilst the *capoeiristas* influenced by Regional claimed that the low game and other aspects of traditional *vadição* were not ‘efficient’, angoleiros insisted on playing low and frequently put their skull on the ground. This was seen as a provocation by many mainstream *capoeiristas*, who attempted to ‘kick the head of angoleiros’ (on the ground) during open *rodas*. Playing capoeira Angola in these days of confrontation with Regional could thus be a dangerous game, but it was thanks to the boldness of these early angoleiros that the style earned recognition.

Moraes and his top student Cobra Mansa (Cinésio Feliciano Peçanha, graduated *mestre* in 1984) moved to Salvador in 1982. After Pastinha’s death in 1981, capoeira Angola seemed on its inexorable way to extinction, with many older *mestres* having retired or making major concessions to Regional style. A couple of faithfuls remained: M. João Pequeno of Pastinha and M. Virgílio of Espinho Remoso were still teaching.<sup>90</sup> João Pequeno received support from Jair Moura and Frede Abreu, two local capoeira scholars keen to revitalize the art. In 1980, for instance, a first Regional Seminar of Capoeira and Festival of the Rhythm of Capoeira was held in Salvador. João Pequeno’s *rodas* at the Forte Santo Antônio attracted an increasing number of players and spectators.

Eyewitnesses agree that ‘the return of Moraes and Cobrinha Mansa [...] had a galvanizing effect on members of the capoeira community’ in Salvador. At the time an increasing number of people considered capoeira Angola to be an art for elderly men. Moraes and Cobrinha, being much younger than the old guard of *mestres* in Salvador, invalidated that view and epitomized the potential of capoeira Angola for the future.<sup>91</sup> GCAP set out in Salvador with Moraes, Cobra Mansa and six other students (Pepeu, Valmir, Poloca, Paulinha, Janja and Natinho). Ten years later the group counted at least 80 regular members, and the six original students had all become *contra-mestres*.<sup>92</sup>

Greg Downey has provided us with a detailed analysis of how GCAP coalesced a corporeal ‘counter-orthopraxy’ that was most successful in opposing the mainstream Regional. He highlights three aspects that mark the kinaesthetic of GCAP: a particular pattern of the use of limbs (the ‘inverted’ body), a ‘soft body’, and ‘broken’ movements.<sup>93</sup> The agenda of the group consisted not only in training and playing capoeira Angola, but also in researching aspects of capoeira history and ‘black culture’ in Brazil and the diaspora, to show that capoeira Angola still existed as a vibrant art, and to bring back into the *roda* the older generation of *mestres* that had abandoned capoeira due to the hegemony of the athletic and acrobatic Regional.<sup>94</sup> M. João Grande even agreed to teach again for GCAP after a six-year absence.<sup>95</sup> The annual ‘Capoeira Angola workshops and exhibitions’, held since 1985, contributed substantially to the group’s objectives, and to make the GCAP known to a wider audience.



Figure 7.6 Four generations of *mestres*: João Grande, Moraes and Cobra Mansa playing *berimbau*, and, standing next to *atabaque*, Rosalvo (organizer of the event). International Summer School of Capoeira Angola group *Vadiação*, Berlin, 2002. Photo by Alessandra Matteoni

What distinguished GCAP from other existing capoeira groups was not only its style, but also its political posture. 'Encouraged and informed in part by a small cadre of well-educated, politicized Afro-Brazilian students, Mestre Moraes emerged as a spokesperson for a radically critical and politically eloquent wing of the *angoleiro* renaissance'.<sup>96</sup> GCAP understood itself as part of the Black Movement, vehemently denounced racism and sought to use capoeira as a means of fighting discrimination. The Fortress of Santo Antônio, a former prison at the edge of the historical centre, had been falling into ruins when it was invaded by squatters and a number of groups and transformed into a Centre for Popular Culture. It hosted not only several capoeira Angola groups, but also the rehearsals of the *bloco afro* Ilê Ayê, and hence became a core venue for the dissemination of Afro-Brazilian racial pride. Precisely for that reason the status of the venue has been under permanent threat from city authorities, interested instead in transforming the fortress into a profitable shopping mall.<sup>97</sup>

The internal structure of GCAP reflected its emphasis on the political objectives of black emancipation. Several Working Commissions (Pictures and Sound, Documentation and Archives, Maintenance, Dissemination, Projects and Research, and Finances) were in charge of specific tasks. Commission co-ordinators and the *mestres* integrated the Deliberative Council, which represented the group. They convoked the General Assembly, to approve the annual agenda of activities. The Council of *mestres* was responsible for teaching and maintaining the 'foundations' of the art. Finally, the Consultative Council, constituted by representatives of other institutions linked to the black or other social movements, provided further assistance to the group. As a consequence, GCAP was able to develop a wide range of activities, which went beyond the usual scope of mainstream capoeira groups. The association with neighbourhood associations and the Axe Project, for instance, allowed for capoeira Angola to be taught to street children. Members of GCAP constituted a group of special students being instructed in Bantu culture and Kikongo language at the Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais, and participated in events organized by other sectors of the Black Movement.<sup>98</sup>

The success of GCAP, both in terms of shaping its own style and of getting its message across, has somewhat cast a shadow over other groups that equally contributed to the 'revitalization' and the

re-invention of capoeira Angola. In Bahia other *mestres* from the old guard continued or resumed teaching capoeira Angola according to their own conceptions, which could often depart substantially from what GCAP tried to establish as Angola orthodoxy. Thus *mestres* such as Boa Gente, Boca Rica, Bobó, Bola Sete, Curió, João Pequeno, Mário Bom Cabrito, Nô, and Paulo dos Anjos contributed to maintaining the Angola style in all its complexity in Salvador. Some of their students started teaching capoeira Angola in other cities of Brazil. M.Jogo de Dentro and Pé de Chumbo, for instance, graduated by João Pequeno, opened academies in São Paulo. The Associação de Capoeira Angola Navio Negreiro (ACANNE) established in 1986 and led by M.Renê Bittencourt, a student of M.Paulo dos Anjos, also sought to recover capoeira Angola and has since established nuclei in various Brazilian states.<sup>99</sup> M.Laercio, Roberval and Rosalvo, who started training with M.Cobra Mansa and other *mestres* at the Forte Santo Antônio created the 'Filhos de Angola' in 1986.<sup>100</sup> During the 1990s, M.Cobra Mansa and most *contra-mestres* graduated under Moraes in Salvador (Boca do Rio, Janja, Paulinha, Poloca, Valmir), left GCAP to set up their own groups there, in the Southeast or abroad.

Thus, through a variety of channels, capoeira Angola spread again throughout Brazil. The style recovered its prestige and was discovered and claimed even by groups who initially had no direct affiliation with the old Bahian angoleiros. As I indicated, Paulista groups such as Cativoiro, who shared at least part of GCAP's political agenda, also moved towards the Angola style. In Rio de Janeiro the famous *roda* in Caxias reverted almost completely to Angola. Participants originally played the style of Artur Emídio that dominated in the Northern Zone at the time, but from the 1980s onwards 'angolized' their game. Even though its key organizers such as M.Russo, still claim to play capoeira without any further stylistic qualification, the Caxias *roda* is now frequented by a large majority of angoleiros.<sup>101</sup>

The Angola style thus gained increasing public space during the 1990s. In 1993 surviving old *mestres* united to found the Brazilian Association of Capoeira Angola—ABCA, the first umbrella organization exclusively for angoleiros. The Bahian government, recognizing the growing importance of the style, provided subsidies and a colonial townhouse in the historic centre of Salvador. The ABCA has developed a programme to support old *mestres* and bring them back into the Angola rodas.<sup>102</sup> M.João Pequeno became the first president of ABCA, followed by M.Curió and Mala. Just as with mainstream capoeira, however, the institutionalization of capoeira Angola has also led to the inevitable power struggles within the organization and disagreements over the policies to adopt.

The growth of capoeira Angola was also encouraged by a group of Afro-centric practitioners and scholars in the United States, who provided assistance to capoeira in general and GCAP in particular. Supporters such as Kenneth Dossar and Daniel Dawson organized events and invited *mestres* from Bahia to attend; this in return contributed to enhancing the prestige of the latter in Brazil. The first CD recorded by GCAP was launched by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, in 1996. The 'First International Encounter' organized by GCAP in 1994, in Salvador, with participants from the United States and Europe, showed how international capoeira Angola had already become. The further development of capoeira Angola became thus closely linked to the growing globalization of the art.

### **'Go around the world!' The globalization of capoeira, 1970s–1990s**

IE! Let's go, let's go, comrade!

IE! Go around the world, comrade!

IE! The turn that the world makes, comrade!

(Verses sung in capoeira *cantos de entrada*)

(Verses sung in capoeira *cantos de entrada*)

Artur Emídio was probably the first *capoeirista* ever to perform abroad, during the 1950s and early 1960s. He visited in Argentina, Mexico, the United States, and Europe. He thus demonstrated capoeira not only to the Brazilian presidents Vargas and Kubitschek, but also to Eisenhower and Kennedy.<sup>103</sup> Subsequently many Brazilian companies toured Europe, the United States and other countries, performing capoeira alongside other Brazilian rhythms and dances. Important for the diffusion of capoeira in Europe during the 1970s was Brasil Tropical, a company headed by the dancer and choreographer Domingos Campos and M. Camisa Roxa. Camisa Roxa, a student of M.Bimba, was at the time considered to be one of the best Regional players of Brazil.<sup>104</sup> Although these companies were primarily interested in attracting audiences for their shows and not to teach capoeira abroad, they ended up making an important contribution to that end. Many capoeira professionals made their first trip to a foreign country as part of a Brazilian folklore group, and at some moment in their journey, or afterwards, decided to teach in a city that appealed to them.

### *Capoeira in the United States*

M.Boca Rica  
Capoeira  
Distinguished capoeira master  
Capoeira  
He gave a workshop in Los Angeles  
Capoeira  
Even the *gringa* wept<sup>105</sup>

In the United States, the introduction of capoeira is attributed to Jelon Vieira and Loremil Machado. They performed capoeira in a Broadway play about Brazilian Indians, *The Leaf People*, in 1975.<sup>106</sup> Subsequently both participated in a range of other productions, such as *The Capoeiras of Bahia* (1979). Jelon Vieira was a student of M.Nito and Ezequiel in Bahia, later affiliated with Senzala from Rio and also became a member of Emília Biancardi's Viva Bahia. In 1977 he founded the company Dance Brazil that allowed him to tour throughout the United States and many other countries. At the same time he started teaching capoeira in New York and to hold workshops in other cities of the East Coast.<sup>107</sup> Many people believe his performances inspired the break dance craze of the 1980s. Jelon himself rather modestly points towards the common African origins of both capoeira and the South Bronx breakdancing.<sup>108</sup> Jelon's outstanding contribution was recognized in 1990, when he was included in the list of the 20 most important martial artists of the 'Hall of Fame International', alongside Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jear-Claude Van Damme.

Bira Almeida, another student of M.Bimba, settled on the West Coast of the United States. M.Acordeon—as he is known among *capoeiristas*—started teaching upper-middle class students at Stanford University in 1979. He soon extended his teachings to poorer neighbourhoods and the Latin community of San Francisco and finally opened his own school Capoeira-Bahia. As early as 1983 he took 52 students on a capoeira study trip to Brazil, where a tournament was held at the USP.<sup>109</sup> M.Acordeon also founded a World Capoeira Association and published one of the first books about capoeira in English (1981). M. Acordeon and Jelon Vieira have played a pivotal role in the expansion of capoeira in the United States, teaching a first generation of United States students.

In the early 1980s there were only four capoeira schools in the United States. M.Jelon and Loremil taught in New York, M.Acordeon in San Francisco and Eusebio da Silva Lobo in East St Louis (Illinois).<sup>110</sup> Yet in subsequent years capoeira practice virtually exploded, to the point that today the art is taught in every single

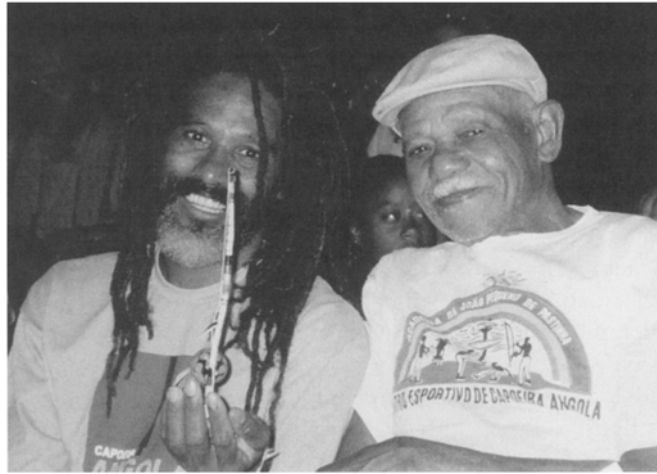


Figure 7.7 Mestres João Pequeno and Cobra Mansa at VII Annual Meeting of the International Capoeira Angola Foundation, Rio de Janeiro State, July 2001. Courtesy of FICA, Washington, DC.

state of the union. Many, if not most senior teachers are Brazilians who have left their native country in search of a better life. The United States and Europe have been the prime destinations for these migrants since the early 1980s. They come from different regions and practise different styles, although the Regional style clearly predominates abroad as it does in Brazil. Prominent among the more recent arrivals are M.Amén and Boneco, who both teach in Los Angeles. In 1992, João Grande, one of the most respected *mestres* of capoeira Angola, settled in New York where he opened his own academy. He was followed by some other well-known angoleiros such as M.Cobra Mansa and Jurandir, who established themselves in Washington and Seattle. These two *mestres* also created the International Capoeira Angola Foundation (FICA) and regularly administer workshops to affiliated groups in other cities (see Figure 7.7).

More than a quarter of a century after its introduction into the country, a number of North Americans are now also in a position to teach capoeira. The first graduation in the United States took place in 1984,<sup>111</sup> and since then the number of advanced students has continued to grow. Some US nationals have finally been granted the title of *contra-mestre*, such as Themba Mashama (former student of M.Acordeon, converted to the Angola style of GCAP), or even *mestre*, such as M.Michael Goldstein (M.Ombrinho, student of M.Nô) and Suellen Einarsen (M.Suely, graduated from M.Acordeon). Today, in New York alone, dozens of well known *mestres* and qualified teachers, such as Jelton Vieira, João Grande, Edna Lima, Bom Jesus, Lincoln, Pilão, Carvão, Caxias, Doutor, Jô and Macaco instruct thousands of *capoeiristas* every day. Mayor Giuliani declared 12 June 1995 ‘Capoeira Day’ to commemorate the 20 years since the art had been introduced into the United States.<sup>112</sup>

### *Capoeira in Europe*

Even though capoeira might have arrived in Europe earlier than in the United States, it took longer for the art to establish itself. Probably the first to teach on the Old Continent was Nestor Capoeira. After receiving his red belt—the highest graduation in the *Senzala*—in 1969, M.Nestor decided to spent some time abroad.

In 1971 he arrived in London, where he started teaching in a Dance Academy for a year. He toured Europe for three years, teaching in different cities, before returning to Brazil.<sup>113</sup>

Another pioneer in Europe was Martinho Fiúza, who came to Germany in 1978 and started to teach in Munich. M.Paulo Siqueira arrived in 1980, and set up a capoeira school in Hamburg. They were followed by hundreds of other capoeira teachers—not always *mestres*—that came during the 1980s and settled in different cities of Western Europe, mainly in Germany, France, Italy, England and the Netherlands, later in Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Spain and Portugal. They are part of a wider migration movement, whereby, for the first time in the history of Brazil, rather than to receive immigrants, hundreds of thousands of its citizens have left the country.

Capoeira was disseminated in various ways within Europe. As in the United States, some senior *mestres* moved from Brazil to Europe. Mestre Canela set up his group Mangangá in Italy in the early 1980s. In 1987, Senzala teachers M.Peixinho, Sorriso, Garrincha e Toni Vargas spent six months in Europe, realizing workshops and the first European Capoeira Encounter.<sup>114</sup> Subsequently M.Sorriso founded a Senzala group in Montpellier (France), and from 1989 onwards M.Gato established Senzala groups in Newcastle and Harlow (Britain). M.Umoi, a student of M.Cordeiro and Alcides from Brasília, took his group União na Capoeira to Portugal in 1990. M.Ousado, a student of M.Zé Pereira in São Paulo, settled in London with his own organization, Argola de Ouro, in 1992 and later took capoeira to Singapore.

Another way capoeira was disseminated was through younger teachers that belonged to major Brazilian groups, and who maintained close links to a senior capoeira figure in Brazil. Thus M.Beija-Flor set up in Paris, and M.Sylvia Bazarelli and CM.Marquinhos in London in the mid-1980s, teaching the style of M.Sombra, leader of the Senzala group from Santos, who came from Brazil to attend their graduation ceremonies.<sup>115</sup> M.Pastel, from the ‘street capoeira’ style of Mercado Modelo in Salvador, created Raizes de Rua in London in 1997, and maintains a weekly *roda* open to all styles (see Figure 7.8). During the 1990s, many big groups from Brazil—Abadá, Artes das Gerais, Cordão de Ouro, Muzenza, Palmares, Filhos de Bimba, etc.—established nuclei in many other cities that further contributed to the globalization of capoeira.

Finally, as in other places, capoeira spread in Europe through a number of younger teachers, not all of them fully qualified for the task. Most came to the Old Continent in search of a better life and the capoeira boom seems to offer those who often do not possess formal qualifications a means of survival. Thus some young Brazilians, who were rather average *capoeiristas* in Brazil, have auto-graduated themselves with the *mestre* title. They are known in the capoeira universe for having acquired their master belt ‘on the plane’ during their flight to Europe. The problem of auto-graduated *mestres* and teachers without supervision, already an issue in Brazil, is aggravated abroad by the almost complete absence of peer control. In particular any new region to which capoeira spreads constitutes a kind of Wild West for the art, where almost everything goes. A number of Europeans with only superficial knowledge of capoeira and Brazilian culture also started to teach. They might distribute glossy leaflets praising their academies and events, but have no senior *mestre* really supporting their work. This has resulted in growing concern among qualified teachers and *mestres*, who insist on maintaining standards and raises the issue of ‘institutionalization’ of capoeira outside Brazil.

Initially, capoeira professionals in Europe felt rather isolated and were usually happy to co-operate with teachers from other groups regardless of individual styles. Some venues became crucial for the growth of European capoeira. Since 1988, M.Paulo Siqueira has been organizing the yearly summer meeting in Hamburg, attended by many Brazilian *mestres*. It developed into one of the biggest capoeira events in Europe during the 1990s, every year attracting hundreds of practitioners from many countries. Cláudio Samara and Luíz Carlos (Marreta) started to organize the Amsterdam Easter meeting in 1991; which has since





Figure 7.8 Mestre Pastel, 3rd *Batizado*, Group Raizes de Rua, London, 2003. Photo by Florence Royer. Courtesy of Raizes de Rua, London.

grown to become another core capoeira event in Europe. Other venues in France and Italy have become equally established as a regular meeting point for European *capoeiristas*. Fast growth changed relations between teachers making them—just as decades earlier in São Paulo—more competitive. If, during the 1980s, the few *capoeiristas* spread over Western Europe needed each other to organize events, the 1990s saw the establishment of several capoeira professionals in the same city. Teachers with a group already consolidated in a city they consider their ‘territory’ do not always see it as an enrichment if another capoeira academy opens in town. The big groups expanding into Europe also tend to favour interaction between their own nuclei rather than encourage relations with other groups. Despite these problems, the proficiency of European capoeira is increasing. Even if it has not yet attained the level of the United States, Europe already has its first native *mestre*. Edgardo Sananiello graduated in 2001 from M.Canela.<sup>116</sup>

### *Consequences of globalization*

Even though the United States and Europe were at the centre of the international growth of capoeira, the art also expanded into other countries. Since the 1970s, for instance, M.Lucídio taught in Japan, with his students participating in the Asian Martial Games.<sup>117</sup> At a relatively early stage capoeira was also introduced in Israel, South Africa, and Canada. The most recent wave of capoeira expansion is directed towards Eastern Europe (Poland, Estonia, Serbia and Finland), Southeast Asia (Singapore), Latin America (Mexico and Venezuela) and Southern Africa (Angola, Mozambique and South Africa). In places as removed from capoeira’s original context as the Pacific, regional events become viable. Thus, in April 2002, 60 capoeira groups from Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Singapore and Japan met in Sydney, where 60 athletes competed during the First International Capoeira Championship of Asia and the Pacific.<sup>118</sup>

No doubt, the extraordinary expansion of capoeira around the globe has far-reaching significance for the art. Many groups have become truly international with growing numbers of students outside Brazil. The



International Capoeira Angola Foundation (FICA), for example, supports 11 affiliated groups in the United States, Brazil and Europe. Topazio, with headquarters in Salvador, and nuclei in Europe, the United States and different Latin American countries, claimed some 10,000 members in 1999.<sup>119</sup> Capoeira'Abadá represents maybe the largest capoeira group to date, counting 20,000 members in 1996, and 25,000 in 1998, spread over 25 Brazilian states and 16 countries in five continents.<sup>120</sup>

The consequences of globalization are only starting to be fully appreciated. Students who do not know the Portuguese language have obviously greater difficulty in singing and understanding the lyrics. Being also unfamiliar with Afro-Brazilian rhythms, they struggle more to incorporate the capoeira *toques* into their *ginga*. As a result, beginners and even intermediate students are often more reluctant to sing and play instruments, and prefer to focus only on the flashy movements. That in return perpetuates the lack of integration between music and movements, and the result is a rather awkward *ginga* without swing that capoeira teachers struggle so hard to improve.

Yet, when capoeira is translated into other cultural contexts, cultural misunderstandings occur on both sides. Recently migrated capoeira teachers often do not speak the host country's language well, let alone understand its culture. One example may help to explain my point. Mestre in Portuguese designates a master in a trade, a handicraft or an art, and someone who teaches his skills to others. It expresses profound respect for the person so addressed. Many capoeira teachers have translated it into English as 'master' and require their students to call them so. Yet in English master also means the slave owner, whereas in Portuguese another word, *senhor* (lord), is used for that purpose. I remember well one Caribbean friend sarcastically commenting that his ancestors had suffered enough at the hands of f\*\*\*ing masters and therefore he would never call someone 'his master'. This kind of misunderstanding occurs on an everyday basis in capoeira classes around the world and 'makes the learning process slower and more difficult'.<sup>121</sup> On the other side, many Brazilian *mestres* insist not only that foreigners can learn capoeira, but that an increasing number of them are becoming quite good at it.

The capoeira teacher has become a Brazilian export product, alongside the *mulata* that dances *samba*, the musician and the footballer. His role abroad has also changed, because here he becomes a specialist of all things Brazilian. He thus not only explains what capoeira is, but how Brazil is. In that process, capoeira is easily transformed into a commodity for people looking for an exotic kick. If capoeira has become an item for consumption, then so has the capoeira teacher. Since many instructors are of black or mixed ancestry, and usually have well-trained bodies, they easily fit into the cliché of the black super-male, and capoeira into the cliché of black corporality. On the other side, a number of Brazilian instructors indulge in the national obsession with blond women (a stereotype possibly derived from the inaccessibility of the white slave owner's wife). Thus teaching capoeira outside Brazil resulted in a complex and new dynamic between male instructors and female students, which has resulted in some major cultural clashes but has also led to important learning processes.

The core question that still needs to be addressed is to what extent the meaning of capoeira changes when the art is exported and further removed from its original context. In Brazil, for instance, slavery not only constitutes a painful heritage for every *afrodescendente*, but also remains a meaningful reference for those who are not, or do not consider themselves to be of African ancestry. Slavery is still alluded to frequently, and thus needs little further explanation from a teacher when commenting on the origins or the meaning of capoeira for slaves. The common heritage of slavery, on the other hand, constitutes the core reason why the art is so attractive for other black people in the Diaspora. Some black practitioners in the United States even argue that only black people can understand what capoeira really is about. As a consequence, some have promoted a *roda* for blacks only that has created uneasiness with other practitioners.<sup>122</sup> A few black United

States teachers have even decided to instruct exclusively African-Americans. The specificity of 'race-relations' and segregation thus has an impact on the way capoeira is practised in the United States.

In general terms, however, globalized capoeira tends to be all-inclusive. Maybe even more than in Brazil, the capoeira classroom has provided, from Stockholm to Sidney and from Boston to Barcelona, a space where class, ethnic, gender and cultural differences are played out and renegotiated. My experience from groups in Berlin, Paris and London suggests that capoeira is particularly attractive to people from multicultural backgrounds, who are in search of a cultural form that can accommodate their own diversity. Growing mutual respect for otherness and understanding of cultural differences is therefore an important outcome of capoeira in this new context. As in Brazil, capoeira can thus operate as a school of citizenship for its practitioners.

Senzala co-founder Gil Velho suggested that capoeira always adapts to new contexts, and that therefore, necessarily, the gestures and the body language will evolve accordingly.<sup>123</sup> In that case it might well be that capoeira in Europe or in the United States will thus one day become European and United States capoeira, and that individual groups will develop styles that correspond to the aesthetics, life-styles and world-views of their specific audiences. One example of this is the *kalunga* paradigm adopted by some United States *capoeiristas*. According to a theory developed by Afro-centric authors, 'the cosmic circle as a means of entering the spirit world' constitutes the 'underlying Central African concept' of capoeira. For them playing capoeira is thus a way to cross the *kalunga*, the border between the living and the dead, and 'ritually mirror the ancestors'.<sup>124</sup> As we have seen in Chapters 3 and 4, that meaning is unheard of in the traditions of Brazilian capoeira and so far alien to Brazilian practice. The *kalunga* paradigm thus constitutes a development that is at present specific to some capoeira circles in the United States.

Capoeira in a global context still provides identity. Despite its use as an African or Afro Brazilian symbol, its globalized practice is, in most cases, no longer linked to a specific class or ethnic group but rather to the feeling of encompassing resistance against oppression, or 'the system'. It seems to offer the advantage of immediate benefits allied to long-term goals. Capoeira has thus become not only a global style, but also part of a globalized subculture of protest, to both of which the African diaspora has already made other substantial contributions through R&B, salsa, samba, soca, reggae and Rastafarianism. Together with other creole arts of the Black Atlantic, capoeira seems thus particularly able to provide the means and the language for an unconformist posture.

Since World War II, this kind of attitude has been labelled as 'cool'. The term originally derives from the aesthetics and attitudes of black jazz and blues musicians in the United States, who used it to describe their way of defending themselves against racial oppression. By making a virtue of their exclusion, they found a way to re-affirm their own values against the dominant white, mainstream culture. The term has become more and more popular over the last decades. Some observers suggested that coolness is the answer to a fundamental contradiction of our everyday life. It enables people to reconcile the cultural revolution of the 1960s with the neo-liberal revolution of the 1980s: subjecting oneself to the harsh requirements of global capitalism in an eight-hour-a-day job and spending evenings and weekends indulging in sex, drugs and Rock'n Roll. Dick Pountain and David Robins have described the cool attitude 'as being constructed from four principal personality traits: detachment, narcissism, irony and hedonism'.<sup>125</sup>

All four attitudes apply well to capoeira. Detachment is trained and acquired when practitioners learn not to over-react in a game but to accept that they have been momentarily caught, or when they train to gaze into the empty space beyond their opponent. The permanent work with one's own body easily favours bodybuilding attitudes of narcissism, reflected in miles of video footage and tons of negatives produced at every capoeira encounter. Irony is developed through the game and the improvisation of capoeira songs that deal with the situation in the *roda*. The aim of training in capoeira is to excel at the game, and playing

capoeira provides so much fun that people get almost addicted to it. Furthermore, as anybody attending a capoeira event will testify, *capoeiristas* are usually very good at celebrating at animated parties and enjoy the good side of life to the extent that many find it hard to stop and go back to daily tasks.

If capoeira, as a creole art of the diaspora, thus seeming to embody coolness almost to perfection, the question is to what extent the growing popularity of that attitude can still count as 'resistance'. If it is true that coolness usurps the work ethics and family values hitherto dominant in the West, it is also bound to become the 'dominant mindset of advanced consumer capitalism'.<sup>126</sup> The dialectic of resistance and co-optation also works for globalized capoeira—it rarely is exclusively one or the other. M.Jelon Vieira declared recently: 'Globalization means Americanizing the world, and capoeira can decolonize the body and the mind'.<sup>127</sup> Many practitioners around the world seem to subscribe to this view. Yet, without denying the 'decolonizing' virtues of the art, it is also clear that capoeira is, at the same time, an important tool of the globalization process.

### Contemporary styles

Changes in capoeira style are due to a number of intertwined factors linked to societal change. Analysing postwar youth subcultures in Britain, Dick Hebdige suggested that they constituted mediated responses to the presence, in Britain, of a sizeable black community. Subcultures represent 'symbolic challenges to a symbolic order', and this author interprets subculture as a 'form of resistance in which experienced contradictions and objections to this ruling ideology are obliquely represented in style'.<sup>128</sup>

In some ways, capoeira constitutes a youth subculture, since the great majority of its practitioners are under 30, abide to specific codes of behaviour and dress, and identify their practice as a form of resistance against a hegemonic world order. At the same time the presence of older players, in particular the *mestres* who are responsible for maintaining tradition and introducing innovation, likens capoeira to other forms of social organizations and identification. Martial arts organizations, just like churches or political parties, tend to divide themselves into feuding factions, especially when they experience periods of sustained growth. Substyles might be the result of bricolage with tradition and innovation, but they also express clear messages that make practitioners come together. Change in formal aspects of the art, and the emergence of new styles is thus always significant because it expresses changes in social context and cultural meanings.

Following the examples of Burlamaqui, Bimba and Pastinha, other capoeira teachers have tried to establish styles of their own. Carlos Sena (sometimes spelled Senna) made one of the earliest attempts. Born in 1931 in Salvador, he started training with Bimba in 1949. He became one of the *mestre*'s best students, partaking in the exhibition for President Vargas in 1953, and became technical director of Bimba's academy in 1954. Yet in 1955 he decided to open his own school called Senavox and to teach a different, more stylized capoeira. What distinguished Sena was his critique of the 'folklorizing cultural stagnation' of capoeira exhibitions and his eagerness to 'sportify' capoeira. He created an elaborate set of formal regulations supposed to rule over training and *rodas*.<sup>129</sup> 'Greatest order, rigid discipline, absolute respect and uncorrupted morals' were the basics to be kept 'inside and outside the temple of capoeira'.<sup>130</sup> Sena—among others—also claims to have invented the colour belt system and systematically advocated the martial capoeira salute 'Salve'. The rules he invented appealed to the armed forces and sympathizers of the military regime. Sena brought capoeira to the elite clubs of Salvador and its military secondary school (Colégio Militar). He also contributed to drafting the 'Technical Rules of Capoeira' that were adopted by the Brazilian Boxing Confederation in 1972.<sup>131</sup> During the 1960s Sena was often considered to represent a third style, different from Angola and Regional, usually referred to as 'stylized' capoeira or just Senavox.<sup>132</sup> Yet, despite initial success and his good connection with the military, Sena's style did not break through in the

long run. Some of his innovations might have been adopted by mainstream capoeira, but his insistence on military hierarchy and discipline increasingly grew out of tune with the times as the military regime's legitimacy eroded in the 1970s.<sup>133</sup>

Another prominent *mestre* who struggled to establish a style on its own alongside Angola and Regional was Washington Bruno da Silva, or M.Canjiquinha (1925–1994). Born in Maciel de Baixo, an impoverished neighbourhood in the old city centre of Salvador, he learned capoeira from 1935 onwards with Aberrê, the famous *mestre* from Santo Amaro and student of Pastinha, and took *berimbau* lessons with Zeca from the Uruguai neighbourhood. In his youth, he was an apprentice shoemaker. He wore the yellow and black jersey of Pastinha's beloved Ipiranga Sports Club, working as a goalkeeper for its football team. He then earned a living as a singer in nightclubs (*gafieiras*).<sup>134</sup> In 1951 he became *contra-mestre* and started teaching in Pastinha's academy. Through a friend, he then managed to be employed on a permanent basis by the Department of Tourism in Salvador and became the main contact person for folklore and capoeira shows, always recommended by that institution. This caused anger among some other *mestres*, keen to obtain contracts for shows themselves. One of them used all the means of *ebó* (magical devices used by *candomblé* practitioners) to bring down Canjiquinha. The latter, also well connected to 'people of the Saints', replied in kind to undo the spells, and a turf war developed until Canjiquinha eventually succeeded in regaining his position.<sup>135</sup>

M.Canjiquinha became well known throughout Brazil with his participation in capoeira scenes in a half-dozen feature films, including *Barravento* (directed by Glauber Rocha) and *Pagador de Promessas* (directed by Anselmo Duarte). He also claims to be the first to have introduced capoeira into carnival, parading with the Mercadores de Bagdá (Merchants of Baghdad), in 1961. His knowledge of Bahian folklore allowed him to spearhead the combination of capoeira with other manifestations such as samba de *roda*, *puxada de rede* and *maculelê* for exhibitions in Salvador and elsewhere. He was proud to have performed capoeira in front of several presidents and other prominent people. A fine singer and musician, Canjiquinha invented two *toques* for capoeira play, Muzenza (according to him inspired from a *candomblé* rhythm) and Samango (for a violent game).<sup>136</sup>

In summary, M.Canjiquinha stood out among all the *mestres* of his generation as one of the very few who were not overwhelmed by the personalities and teachings of Bimba and Pastinha. Canjiquinha came to be perceived as the third of the great *mestres* from Salvador, a place he certainly deserves in terms of his influence on contemporary capoeira, even though he was never perceived as having created a new style. Having learned from Aberrê and taught and toured with Pastinha, he had the best possible credentials as an angoleiro. Yet, once he had founded his own academy, he neither fully supported the revivalist posture adopted by Pastinha nor clearly changed sides into the Regional camp.

His cheerful personality made him popular among *capoeiristas* and he was often invited to major events in the wealthier Southeast and other regions. Consecration came when M. Brasília and his other Paulista students dedicated a capoeira folklore festival to him, promoted by the São Paulo Capoeira Federation. The Trophy Mestre Canjiquinha, created in 1981, further contributed to the spread of his fame. As he confessed later: 'I cried because the emotion was too much. Just think, 30,000 people giving me applause'.<sup>137</sup>

Canjiquinha's independent posture with regards to the two doyens of Bahian capoeira struck a cord with some younger teachers and students in São Paulo, who felt the classic opposition between Angola and Regional was not useful in their context. Canjiquinha's fast and upright style convinced them that *mandinga* could be expressed in many ways. His personal friendship with a number of Bimba's students, such as M.Itapoan and Ezequiel in Salvador, and many more in São Paulo, facilitated the acceptance of his teachings and innovations outside the strict Angola universe. The Samango, for instance, started to be played by the *capoeiristas* in the land of the drizzle (São Paulo). During an excursion to the South, an issue

arose between Canjiquinha and Pastinha—in part out of personal rivalry, but also over the very understanding of their art.<sup>138</sup> As a result of these re-alignments, Canjiquinha became one of the most outspoken critics of the radical revivalists among the *angoleiros*. He ultimately questioned their claim to be the only legitimate heirs of the traditional *vadiação*:

I teach the student to play low and high. Because I am not an Angolan. I was born in Brazil, in Salvador. I did not learn capoeira in Nigeria. Therefore, this whole thing of capoeira de Angola is an illusion. So much so that there is no capoeira in Angola. [...] I learned with Aberrê. He also played with his leg high. Look at the movie *Vadiação*, the late Curió playing fast, low and high. If you don't know the guy, you go there and give a low *meia lua*. And if you know him, and there is no wickedness, you are playing with your friend, you raise your leg.<sup>139</sup>

As a result, Canjiquinha substantially contributed to shaping the style of the mainstream capoeira that emerged in the Southeast, in particular in São Paulo, from the 1960s onwards. Capoeira practitioners still disagree over how to denominate this style. Some, especially the *angoleiros* from Bahia, labelled it as Regional, whilst the majority just called it capoeira, understanding that it was a new development that was not, strictly speaking, Bimba's child alone. In that respect they were right. The new mainstream capoeira played to an orchestra that was hardly how Bimba liked it: not just *berimbaus* and *pandeiros*, but with *atabaque* and *agogô*. Even the *toques* were not Bimba's favourites (see Chapter 5), but rather São Bento Grande de Angola or São Bento Pequeno de Angola. *Rodas* also were more likely to start with *ladainhas*, not the *quadras* preferred by Bimba. If, therefore, some aspects of capoeira Angola were retained or re-introduced by the Bahian *mestres* and their students in the Southeast, others were abandoned for the same reasons Bimba had rejected them. In particular, the *chamadas* virtually disappeared from *rodas* in Southeast Brazil. Other innovations of the Regional style were also eagerly adopted. Capoeira instructors insisted on the repetitive training of particular kicks or movements, eventually without music. In particular the famous eight sequences (*sequências*) invented by Bimba were taught in many academies. As a result, fast and upright games predominated in the *rodas* (even though they might initiate with an Angola *toque* and a slower game).

Moreover, the 'baptism' and the graduation ceremonies invented by Bimba were universally adopted and became a key feature of mainstream contemporary capoeira (although, in contrast to Bimba, contemporary practitioners tend to call any graduation ceremony a 'baptism'). The coloured belts, representing a clear system of achievable aims, met the expectations of students living in a very different context from the one where the Bahian *vadiação* had thrived, namely the industrializing and fast growing cities of the Southeast.<sup>140</sup> Here, Catholic inspired festivals had lost importance, due to the more advanced process of secularization. Capoeira *rodas* therefore needed to find a new context. Although a few street *rodas* were eventually established according to the Bahian model (such as the *roda* in Caxias, a suburb of Rio de Janeiro, and the *roda* on the Praça da República in São Paulo), the *rodas* that students in Southeast Brazil attended were mainly those of their own academies or others they visited. And graduation became the core event, where *capoeiristas* from different schools could play together, and also show off their skills.

In summary, formal developments and stylistic adjustments in capoeira related to broader changes in the socio-economic context and upcoming new cultural trends. The mainstream style that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s grew out of the innovations introduced by M. Bimba and adopted some features directly from the Angola style and yet was different from both. It was a hybrid about which, 40 years later, there is still no agreement on what it should be called. Lewis, after consultation with his teacher and informant M.Nô, proposed calling that 'postmodern synthesis' capoeira *atual* ('current capoeira').<sup>141</sup> Currently the expression

‘capoeira contemporânea’ is more widely used to designate all ‘hybrid’ styles. Since that expression can lead to some confusion—there also exists a contemporary Angola and a contemporary Regional—I will refer to it as mainstream capoeira.

Practitioners today still assess contemporary styles in terms of Angola and Regional, although many recognize the inadequacy of such a bi-polar approach. To evaluate contemporary styles it is necessary to look again at social context, formal aspects and cultural meanings. Contemporary capoeira happens in several contexts and for different purposes, which can be summarized under four main headings, according to the emphasis: fighting, sport, show and art. These distinctions are far from absolute, and the same individuals eventually practise several kinds.

The capoeira modality that places the main—if not the only—emphasis on fighting occurs mainly in ring contests and street rodas, even though graduation events in some groups are not exempt from games which also turn into fights. ‘Rough capoeira’ (*capoeira dura*) in a contemporary *roda* means full contact, and not sparing the adversary when one can place a kick. As one of its supporters, the boxer and capoeira teacher Nanico, explains:

I think beating (*pancadaria*) is good. I learned capoeira being beaten up and I like a rough game, heavy game. Sometimes, when I receive a kick that breaks my mouth, my nose, I even like it because I am learning. Beating (*pancadaria*) is important in capoeira. *Pancadaria* is not violence [...]<sup>142</sup>

He is representative of a new generation of fighters in the tradition of the former *valentões* who, confident in their combat skills, proudly challenge their peers: ‘In the capoeira *roda* I only fear God’.<sup>143</sup> Some of them have a nationwide reputation, such as M.King Kong from Salvador, M.Maurão from São Paulo, or King from Rio de Janeiro (formerly Abadá). For them, *capoeiristas* should be able to play rough games so that the art does not lose its efficiency in combat. M.Maurão, among others, calls this the search for ‘objectivity’ in capoeira, and insists this is not to be confused with violence or aggression.<sup>144</sup>

Rough games take place in street *rodas*, such as the Mercado Modelo, in Salvador or the Praça da República in São Paulo, and can also be seen in academies, especially in those which train in full contact (this does not mean that necessarily all games in those *rodas* are rough). Since they explore the boundaries between games and fights, they sometimes turn into real fights, and often result in injuries. On a number of occasions they have even resulted in the death of *capoeiristas*, for instance in Petrópolis in 1996. These events are usually followed by a public outcry against ‘violence’ in the *rodas*. Since in general the *mestre* in charge of the *roda* is held responsible for any incident, these comments are often accompanied by an appeal for state intervention, the necessity of regulating capoeira teaching and eventually the appeal to boycott a specific group.<sup>145</sup> Although accidents can never be totally avoided, these tragic events show that *capoeiristas* often enter a *roda* with diametrically opposed expectations: some want a game and others a fight. In other words, disagreements over the basic rules can explain why ‘objectivity’ for some players is ‘violence’ for others.<sup>146</sup>

For that reason the ideal context for combat capoeira seems to be the ring, where fighting rules are clearly established in advance. Continuing the tradition of Ciriaco, Sinhozinho, Bimba and Arthur Emídio, contemporary capoeira fighters have been learning and training in all kinds of martial arts, in particular *ju-jitsu*, boxing, and *taekwondo*. The cross-fertilization between martial arts is encouraged by free-style competitions that are popular around the world. Brazil has champions in *judo*, *ju-jitsu* and other martial arts, and no wonder some of them have turned to capoeira to complement their skills. Brazilian free style champions such as Marcus Ruas have acknowledged the importance of capoeira in their training.<sup>147</sup> The use of capoeira techniques in free style competitions shows to what extent the art still provides essential fighting



techniques in the universe of combat sports. On occasions, *capoeiristas* even win free-style competitions. In 1995, for instance, M.Hulk (Sidney Gonçalves Freitas), became the champion of the First Tira-Teima Nacional de Vale-Tudo.<sup>148</sup>

Yet the practice of other martial arts by *capoeiristas*, keen to ensure that capoeira does not become outdated in terms of combat efficiency, has also made techniques from other martial arts increasingly important in their capoeira practice. An example of this development is M. Dinho (Raimundo dos Santos), leader of the group Topázio from Bahia. His students do not hesitate to use *ju-jitsu* movements in the *roda*, whenever conditions seem favourable. M. Dinho explains that instead of a kick,

Our guys learn to immobilize applying an ‘American’ or an arm-lock, *ju-jitsu* moves that do not hurt, but neutralize the [other’s] action. Why give a beating? To immobilize demoralizes more than to give a beating.

M.Dinho believes that contemporary capoeira needs the same type of reform and updating as it did in the 1930s. For that reason he claims to have adopted M.Bimba’s approach towards other martial arts, and believes himself to be able to continue with the *mestre*’s work: ‘I added things to strengthen capoeira. I only wanted to improve the efficiency of capoeira’.<sup>149</sup>

Throughout Brazil some capoeira teachers go down this road of ‘improving’ capoeira by introducing new movements. Another example is the ‘Capoeira Free Style’ taught in São Paulo by Lúcio Antônio de Carvalho, better known as Pernambuco, who makes clear that ‘acrobatics do not work’.<sup>150</sup> *Ju-jitsu*, especially, seems to be the favourite martial art to be fused with capoeira, to the point that some people now talk about ‘capo-jitsu’. If these developments have the merit to maintain capoeira in the pool of combat arts, one cannot but wonder to what extent ‘capo-jitsu’ or ‘capo-boxing’ still can be considered capoeira. The dividing line remains not so much between full contact and not, but rather—as in the 1930s—the use of grabbing or punching techniques. Many capoeira practitioners still believe that their use is not compatible with capoeira. That is why the *corrido* ‘Oh Mrs Alice don’t grab me!’ is still sung in contemporary *rodas*.

The only way to avoid capoeira losing its identity as a distinct combat art is to establish rules that prevent contestants from using boxing punches or *ju-jitsu* grabs and blocks. The rules adopted by Capoeira Federations and CBC (Brazilian Capoeira Confederation) precisely intend to match that purpose. Competitions require precise rules and guidelines to assess the individual performance and to decide who is the champion. This goal-orientated ethos was precisely something unthinkable in the old days of the *vadiação*, where most of the time there was no clear ‘winner’ or ‘loser’.

This modality of capoeira thus became governed, like any other sport, by an increasingly sophisticated system of regulations. And since the rules tend to shape the type of game, practitioners easily disagree over what these should be. Not only have the rules established in the 1970s changed as we have seen, but capoeira groups, which are not members of the confederation, have adopted their own regulations for the competitions they organize. When capoeira became a modality in the Brazilian School Games (Jogos Escolares Brasileiros—JEBs) in 1985, the organizers adopted their own rules for the capoeira competitions, which included a song contest.<sup>151</sup> Another prominent example are the ‘Brazilian Games’ held by Abadá-Capoeira since 1997 in different categories (according to belt, age and gender). In 2000, Abadá coordinated ‘Regional Games’ in various Brazilian states and even in Europe, where thousands of *capoeiristas* from all over the world met. The best *capoeiristas* were then allowed to participate in the Brazilian Capoeira Games in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>152</sup> In contrast to free style fighting competitions, the assessment is made for each game and not for individual players. Contestants therefore accumulate points from each of their games and try to get the highest possible score in order to qualify for the next phase of the competition. The jury assesses

technique, creativity, rhythm, objectivity, continuity, character and even the overall knowledge of the art. Grabbing and intentionally hitting the other player is forbidden and penalized. Contestants have to show their skills in different types of game. In contrast with the former *vadiação*, they have no time to lose. A game to the rhythm São Bento Grande lasts only 45 seconds, 60 for Iúna and 90 for Benguela or Angola.<sup>153</sup>

Other competitions, following different rules, also attract substantial numbers of practitioners and spectators. Muzenza, for instance, another of the great capoeira groups, is well known for its yearly events (Curitiba Open de Capoeira) and also organized the First Mundialito de Capoeira in Curitiba (Paraná) in 2000, which resulted in a classification table of the best *capoeiristas*.<sup>154</sup> In contrast with the Abadá Games, targeted only at the members of that association, many different capoeira groups participate in the Muzenza events, encouraging thus an inter-group dynamic which is also the objective of the competitions organized by the Brazilian Confederation.

No doubt the particular rules adopted by each organization shape the type of game played in these competitions. The outlawing of certain attacks, the obligation to use specific movements, and the inclusion or not of aesthetic requirements outline the framework for games, and eventually mould the style of play. Since participants train for best performance in these competitions, the regulations inevitably influence everyday practice in the academies. The success of capoeira competitions according to the sports model has even led some practitioners to advocate, and actively pursue, the constitution of capoeira as an Olympic discipline.<sup>155</sup>

The capoeira for show constitutes the third modality that impacted massively on the way capoeira is performed, perceived, and even played today. As we have seen in [Chapter 6](#), the growing market for folklore exhibitions in the 1950s and 1960s allowed both M.Bimba and Pastinha to travel to the Southeast with their respective students. Possibilities for travel and exhibitions expanded further during subsequent decades. Following the example of the precursor company Oxumaré during the 1950s, other groups that toured in Brazil and abroad in the 1960s contributed to make capoeira known to wider audiences, and ultimately helped to spread the art. The group Viva Bahia, established in 1963, became a core reference in that respect. Its founder and director, the Bahian music teacher Emília Biancardi, researched Bahian folklore for many years and was therefore in a position to mount a spectacle that integrated a wide range of manifestations, among which was the then largely-unknown stick fight/dance *maculelê*, originally only performed in Santo Amaro. Subsequently a number of other capoeira groups, including those led by M.Bimba, Pastinha and Canjiquinha, adopted *maculelê* for their own exhibitions.<sup>156</sup> Its showy choreography and infectious rhythm quickly made it popular and *maculelê* has become a kind of subsidiary exercise in many capoeira academies.

M.Acordeon created the Grupo Folclórico da Bahia in 1964, which, according to his own words, ‘pioneered ideas still used by performing groups today’. The group used small acts drawn from the history of Bahia in their exhibitions and later performed entire theatrical plays.<sup>157</sup> These and some other groups were important for *capoeiristas* without means who wanted to carve out a living with the art. Many well-known professionals in the capoeira universe initiated their career with these groups. During the 1960s, teachers and *mestres* living in the Southeast also started to form their own folklore groups, for instance the groups Capoeiras do Bomfim (M.Mário Santos), and Capoeira de Angola (M.Joel Lourenço).<sup>158</sup>

No doubt requirements of stage exhibitions impacted on capoeira style. Since acrobatics seemed more likely to impress audiences unacquainted with the secrets of *mandinga*, the former tended to substitute the latter. It was also easier to astonish the public with games where kicks were combined in advance, or even train whole choreographies, rather than to improvise anew for each exhibition. The impact of folkloric exhibitions, and tourism more generally, on capoeira practice did not fail to attract criticism from an early stage. ‘Street capoeira is dead: Today it is [only] for tourists to look at’ one newspaper proclaimed in 1960.

'Tourism distorts and sells off tradition' claimed A Tarde and reported protest by M.Bimba and Jair Moura against the commercialization of capoeira.<sup>159</sup> At that stage it looked like capoeira in Bahia was going to survive only as a function of tourism, with famous *mestres* having to rely on tourists' pittances to supplement their meagre incomes.<sup>160</sup>

Yet the complete folklorization of capoeira, as feared by many observers in the 1960s, did not happen, mainly because capoeira practice expanded so much. Shows are still important for contemporary capoeira, affecting the public image or the spread of the art. Capoeira for show remains rather a side line when compared to the several million practitioners of the art around the world; in fact, shows now are often part and parcel of a graduation ceremony to attract new students.

Many capoeira groups—all Angola groups but also a number of those broadly classified as Regional—are not interested in stage shows nor do they hold any type of competition. They consider that the *roda* in itself is the ultimate goal and supreme expression of the art, and that it provides all the necessary components for practitioners to develop their skills, to experience the excitement of danger and the flows of *axé*. They emphasize capoeira as an art, and thus this last modality tries to preserve the uneasy balance between fight, game and dance. According to many practitioners, this holistic approach is what, ultimately, defines capoeira.

Capoeira as a fight, capoeira as a sport, capoeira as a folkloric show, and capoeira as art denominate the core modalities where contemporary capoeira happens. They represent trends, not neatly segmented categories. Some practitioners perform in various modalities, others move from one to the other. Their play changes accordingly. As in the past, skilled *capoeiristas* today are still able to play rough if necessary or set free their *mandinga* for a game full of cunning and ritual. That ambiguity is still at the very heart of the art for most practitioners.

Play in different modalities relates to difference in style, but style entails much more than the difference between antagonistic and playful games. In a seminal article the anthropologist Alejandro Frigerio sought to establish the key characteristics that differentiate capoeira Angola from Regional. He singled out eight aspects for Angola, or capoeira as art, namely cunning, complementation (of the two players' movements), a low game, the absence of violence, beautiful movements (according to a 'black aesthetic'), slow music and the importance of ritual and theatricality. According to Frigerio, Regional, or capoeira as sport is, in contrast, characterized by growing bureaucratization, the incorporation of elements from other martial arts, ideological and political co-optation by the system, and evolutionary conceptions that encourage continuous 'improvements', which transformed capoeira from 'black culture' into 'white sport'.<sup>161</sup> Even though Frigerio recognized that his classification cannot be applied rigidly to what is rather a continuum between two poles, he ultimately identified Angola with 'traditional' capoeira and took fully on board the angoleiro discourse about their own practice and their judgement about 'Regional' (by which they mean mainstream capoeira). He therefore ignored the fact that many older *mestres* of Regional voice exactly the same concerns about contemporary mainstream practice, criticizing for instance the standardization of movements, the excessive distance between players, the lack of creativity and *mandinga* or the frequent recourse to violence.<sup>162</sup> Frigerio also neglected the fact that both traditional *vadição* and contemporary Angola music is not necessarily slow, but rather uses the full range of rhythmic possibilities. Furthermore, bureaucratization and co-optation are by no means exclusive to 'Regional' groups, but also take place in the Angola universe.

Even the idea of a linear continuum between two poles—Angola and Regional—can hardly provide an adequate sense of the complex dynamics that take place, on different levels, between these two poles. For instance, not only 'Regional' *mestres*, but Angoleiros as well have—since the times of Aberrê—practised other martial arts. M.Paulo dos Anjos (José Paulo dos Santos, 1936–1999), a student of M.Canjiquinha and

recognized authority in the Angola style, was a boxer.<sup>163</sup> M.Boa Gente (Vivaldo Rodrigues da Conceição) a student of M.Gato from Bahia, practised *taekwondo* and became the Bahia free-style champion in 1974; he was also made a *mestre* at Bimba's academy where he taught for eight years. He is, nevertheless, still recognized as an *angoleiro* and holds an office at the ABCA.<sup>164</sup> They, and some other *mestres* with a recognized Angola lineage, adopted features identified as 'Regional'. M.Canjiquinha and Paulo dos Anjos used high kicks and belt graduations, and so do M.Nô and M.Macumba at present.

This raises two problems. First, the tricky issue of what the frame of reference for capoeira Angola should be, M.Pastinha alone or the broader practice of *vadiação*? Second, to what extent can there be innovation in capoeira Angola after Pastinha? Since Angola auto-defines itself as a traditionalist practice, innovations are considered anathema amongst most *angoleiros*—which does not mean there are none. Yet as we have seen in Chapter 6, Angola was an innovation using the trappings of tradition, and therefore shifts and changes are hardly recognized as such. That is one of the reasons why there are arguments over what constitutes the 'genuine' Angola. Since the Angola style was always developed in opposition to Regional, there is a trend to eliminate, to 'purify' the style from everything that smells of Regional influence, even if that in fact drives the style further away from the *vadiação* as it existed prior to Pastinha. In that sense, it is true that there could be no Angola style without the negative reference of Regional.

Not only the practice of various modalities by some people, and constant individual shifts and broader developments make assessment of capoeira styles difficult, but also the gap between self-definition and ascription by others. Who deserves to be classified as *angoleiro*, for instance, is by no means straightforward. Students of Pastinha, who became *mestres* themselves, are universally recognized as constituting the hard core of the Angola style. The same applies to pupils of other famous *mestres*, such as Cobrinha Verde or Waldemar. Yet beyond that nucleus exists a cloud of *capoeiristas* who assert to be *angoleiros* as well. Their claim is challenged by the hard-core *angoleiros* on two grounds, genealogy and style. The hard core insist that first of all a true *angoleiro* has to have learned from a *mestre* of capoeira Angola, the only way to learn and be properly initiated to the art. *Capoeiristas* who have practised other styles for many years and suddenly decide to swap to Angola are frowned upon as still being, in essence, 'Regional'. Some workshops with an Angola *mestre*, they insist, cannot replace the long apprenticeship a true *angoleiro* has to go through, and will not eradicate the 'vices' implanted by years of practice in the Regional style. M.Moraes even compared the need to have a *mestre* to a direct kinship relation in his *ladainha*: 'Who has a famous father/The son always talks about him/[...]Who has no father nor *mestre*, also has no tradition'.<sup>165</sup>

If many practitioners therefore claim to be *angoleiro*, regardless of what the hard-core might think of that assertion, the appeal to position oneself as Regional has clearly evolved in the opposite direction. During the 1960s and 1970s M.Bimba was the key reference for many upcoming groups, but this posture seems to have lost some of its momentum in the last decades. Relatively few groups claim to practise an unaltered, Regional style. Probably the main reference here is Mestre Nenel, and his brothers Demerval and Luís, sons of the late Bimba. The association 'Sons of Bimba' was created in 1986, and maintains training venues around the city of Salvador. The group is also linked to the Mestre Bimba Foundation, which deals with the broader legacy of Manoel dos Reis Machado. M.Nenel explicitly seeks to continue the work of his father, and as a consequence, keeps as close as possible to teaching the 'original' Regional hallmarks. He and other students of Bimba vehemently question the assumption that the contemporary, mainstream capoeira is Regional.<sup>166</sup>

Some other groups around the country also claim exclusive allegiance to Bimba, but it remains to be seen to what extent that is verified in their everyday training and *roda* practice. The vast majority of contemporary practitioners, however, affirm to be neither Angola nor Regional. Most *mestres* now adopt what one could term an ecumenical approach, asserting, for example, that 'there is only one capoeira'

(‘Capoeira é uma só’). This usually means that a *capoeirista* should be able to play to any *toque* of the *berimbau*, thus contributing to maintaining a variety of rhythms in the *roda*. M.Acordeon already reminded his readers and students in the 1980s: ‘Whatever style the berimbau call, the *capoeirista* must play, no matter if it is fast, slow, a fight, or only a playful game’.<sup>167</sup> As we have seen in Chapters 4 and 5, Angola and São Bento Grande were two among the many *toques* used in the Bahian *vadiação*. Pastinha placed the slower Angola *toque* at the heart of his style, and so did M.Bimba with his faster São Bento Grande de Regional. But both still used a fairly wide range of other *toques* in their *roda*. Yet, in many contemporary groups, there is a clear trend to assimilate styles (Angola and Regional) to variants of play, similar to the role of the different *toques* in traditional *vadiação*. Thus M. Amen, for instance, asserts: ‘Angola and Regional. The Berimbau determines what you will play’.<sup>168</sup>

In a field where dogmatic disputes are frequent, such an ‘open’ posture can easily win support from audiences, especially from those students who are primarily concerned with training and are not that interested in fractional strife between styles, groups or *mestres*. Yet the reduction of Angola and Regional styles to two different *toques* that can be played in the same *roda* glosses over an undeniable fact: When mainstream practitioners play what they call Angola (a game to that rhythm or *toque*), this is still very different from a game (to whatever *toque*) in an *angoleiro roda*. Thus the ‘ecumenical’ posture can also reflect a strategy to impose a homogenized mainstream, which some of its critiques call ‘Angonal’. Arguments over the possibility of teaching two styles are obviously also market driven and commanded by the necessity for each group and *mestre* to accumulate as much symbolic capital as possible. In a capitalist society the more you can offer the more you will sell.

Also very common among *mestres* and group leaders is the assertion that they teach ‘a mixture’ or ‘a synthesis’ of Angola and Regional. Since mainstream or ‘current’ capoeira has drawn elements from both styles, there is undoubtedly an objective basis to that claim. Thus M.Mão Branca, from the well-known group Capoeira Gerais, for example asserts:

Since I was neither a student of M.Bimba, nor of M.Pastinha, I did and I do not need to follow that radical line of either of them. Because I love capoeira, I decided to fuse the two styles, within a work that caters for both sides, according to the necessity of my students. I simply recover (*resgato*) the two styles.<sup>169</sup>

As a means to rescue lost tradition, Capoeira Gerais requires students to visit the city of Bahia before they graduate. This *capoeirista* pilgrimage to Salvador has become a tradition in itself, and has further contributed to the fluidity of contemporary styles. Many Regional teachers or *mestres* who went to the sacred temples of capoeira in Bahia altered their style on their return and introduced those changes into their teachings. They might, for example, re-introduce Bimba’s rhythms in their *rodas* or attempt to ‘angolize’ their game by introducing *chamadas*, making wider use of movements on the ground, or infusing more *mandinga* in their *ginga*. The critique of contemporary developments inevitably leads to trends that try to ‘rescue’ what has been lost. M.Suassuna, for instance, developed the ‘Miudinho’ modality (from ‘miudo’ = small), an attempt to ‘recover’ Angola and to re-introduce a closer game into mainstream capoeira.<sup>170</sup>

Precisely because mainstream styles evolve so rapidly, Angola and Regional remain the basic categories to define all of them. The two key references of contemporary capoeira entertain a very unequal relationship. Angola has developed over recent decades into an increasingly positive reference for mainstream styles: it is identified with the roots of capoeira, a ‘mother’ to which every son has to return at least once in his lifetime. *Angoleiro mestres* are regularly invited to Regional events, but the opposite never occurs, since Regional *mestres* are not considered to have any competence in Angola circles. They are at

best tolerated, since their mistakes threaten to ‘infect’ the purity of Angola. So, whereas Angola is considered the mother of Regional, Regional has become a kind of devil for many angoleiros, especially for weaker students who dislike ‘aggressive’ games or fear Regional ‘violence’. The Angola *mestres* invited to Regional events, on the contrary, rather tend to see every practitioner there as a potential recruit for their style. This reflects the shifting power relations between both styles: whereas up to the 1970s many angoleiros changed to Regional, since the 1980s mainly the opposite seems to occur. After observing many angoleiros from Bahia play, ‘Regional’ *mestres* and teachers such as Marrom from Senzala in Rio de Janeiro, Deraldo in Boston and China in Barcelona have decided to become angoleiros.

There is also a marked contrast between style, political stance and individual affinities. Conflicts over questions of style, the regulation of the profession or the links with the state do not neatly divide angoleiros and ‘regionalists’. On the contrary, long friendships unite *mestres* from different styles who profess respect for each other, whereas conflicts divide Angola and Regional federations (ABCA and CBC). At the level of students, though, one can often see a broad antipathy for ‘Regional’ or specific styles considered ‘violent’ or ‘inefficient’. This reflects the different experience of teachers and students: angoleiro *mestres* like to be invited to Regional events, whereas angoleiro students, especially beginners, fear to play in a Regional *roda*, because of ‘aggression’ or ‘violence’. Regional *mestres* often appreciate an Angola game, whereas many weaker mainstream practitioners do not always like to play in an angoleira *roda* because of the number of rules with which they have to comply (and which they often do not know).

In fact a certain commonality of views prevails among the traditionalists—or purists—from both Angola and Regional. Both agree that the rapid growth of capoeira (‘capoeira inchou!’) resulted in loss of tradition, the autograduation of *mestres*, the lack of preparation and experience. From here a common agenda of action against creeping commercialization or the tackling of other problems affecting the art seems possible.

It is therefore difficult to establish clear-cut categories for contemporary styles, and easier to appreciate substyles of specific groups. Over the last years some key references have emerged, based on the most prestigious groups such as Abadá, Cordão de Ouro, FICA, GCAP and Senzala. Groups consciously support or even build up these identifications. Some practitioners, for instance, might even say they practise ‘Abadá’, or capoeira-Abadá instead of capoeira. The style of each group differs according to a wide range of criteria, from formal aspects to cultural meanings. For reasons of space I can only indicate some elementary criteria, which might help beginners to find their way through contemporary capoeira groups and events.

Formal differences start with capoeira uniforms. Regional and most mainstream groups train and play barefoot and use white clothes and belts, whereas angoleiros always train with shoes. As we have seen in [Chapter 4](#), all these dress codes refer to different aspects of earlier capoeira practice, and thus they can all claim to be derived from tradition. Some groups train without T-shirts, as this supposedly conveys an even stronger association with slaves’ bodies. However no absolute consistency exists within each style. *Angoleiros*, even Pastinha’s followers for instance, use alternatively yellow and black or white only uniforms—both linking to different traditions.

The contrast between the low game and the high game remains a key formal aspect that differentiates groups. Does a group train mainly in upright kicks or also insist students learn how to evolve closely to the ground and use these skills in the *roda*? How ‘antagonistic’ or playful are games? Is full contact and grabbing allowed or even encouraged or are students expected to rather use *rasteiras* and other resources?

The didactics used for teaching are equally important to assess a group’s style. Training Bimba’s sequences, for instance, is still considered a hallmark of Regional, even though every contemporary capoeira group trains some kind of choreographed movements to prepare students for the *roda*. Some groups insist on long warm ups based on contemporary gymnastics, and only then have students rehearse



capoeira movements. Other groups, in particular from capoeira Angola, consider that capoeira movements in themselves are gymnastics and therefore can also be used to warm up.

A further aspect that differentiates groups is to what extent do teachers compel group members to learn instruments and play the basic *toques*? *Angoleiros* typically want students to train to the music at all times, in order to internalize the connection between rhythm and movement, and preferably to live music of the orchestra rather than to scratched records or sound systems. Which rhythms are played in the *roda*? Some mainstream groups tend to play exclusively fast and upright São Bento Grande, whilst others insist that practitioners must be able to play various types of game, according to the rhythm of the *berimbau*, and use a wide range of *toques* in their *rodas*.

Groups also differ widely over the rituals used in the *roda* and the extent students are required to know them. It is easy to observe that many groups tend to develop their own rules regarding, for instance, the order of the instruments within the orchestra, the way in which students ‘queue’ to play, and if, when and how it is allowed to ‘buy’ a game.

Class and ethnic background constitute a further criterion to differentiate groups and styles and here one is well advised not to take self-descriptions always for face value. Some groups, in particular from the Angola style, often claim to represent black and lower-class constituencies, whilst depicting Regional practitioners as white and middle class. Although I cannot produce statistical evidence, my own observations suggest that in fact groups classed as ‘Regional’ can be as ‘black’ and ‘working class’ as any Angola group, and this applies not only to Salvador and the Recôncavo, but equally to Rio de Janeiro or other cities. In contrast, many Angola groups have a significant number of white and/or middle class members. In that respect one has to take note of M.Miguel’s (from Grupo Cativoiro) critique of the ‘bourgeoisification’ of Angola in the metropolis São Paulo:

There are those people who say that capoeira is not a sport, that it is a culture of resistance. But they have no commitment with anything; it is the people from capoeira Angola. Today the capoeira Angola in São Paulo is geared towards the elite; the angoleiros are in the middle class neighbourhoods.<sup>171</sup>

As we have seen, Cativoiro was a key actor in the process of ‘re-Africanization’ or ‘Angolization’ of capoeira in São Paulo during the 1980s. In the 1990s some teachers from Bahia introduced what they consider the genuine Angola style in the city, and thus clashed with Cativoiro’s claims.<sup>172</sup> Class is used here as a device to polemicize with rival groups, just as elements of style are often perceived as representing social or political differences. This raises the issue of to what extent capoeira, or specific substyles, are still part of a specifically black or lower class ‘habitus’, and to what extent it can be transposed into other ethnic, class, and gender contexts. In other words, can white middle class females move like black lower classmales?<sup>173</sup>

Capoeira groups differentiate themselves also with regards to how they see capoeira history and how much emphasis they place on the need for practitioners to learn about it, in order to raise their consciousness. The commitment to social and political work at grass root level—teaching capoeira to street children for example—is much stronger in some groups than in others, where practice alone is seen as somehow enough evidence for the mantra that ‘capoeira is resistance’.

The type of leadership is also another fundamental—even though often overlooked—aspect that differentiates capoeira groups. ‘The *mestres*, these central figures of the capoeira world, are a kind of mediators around which loyalties and more or less narrow and rigid hierarchies are constituted [...]’.<sup>174</sup> They are therefore at the core of a group’s identity and paramount to the relationship between groups and with the wider society. Many *mestres* have outstanding personal qualities and have become charismatic

leaders of quite large associations—indeed, communities—of thousands of members. Others still struggle to impose their leadership, especially those who have not passed through the recognized path to mastership or who lack some of the required qualities for such a role.<sup>175</sup>

It is here that the discourse about tradition or innovation, and stylistic orthodoxy connects with corporate interests. We have seen that many teachers claim to practise ‘a mixture of Angola and Regional’. As some *mestres* have not failed to point out, however, this assertion also allows lower graded teachers to do whatever they want, without having to comply with the requirements of one of the ‘historic’ styles. This posture eventually allows students to avoid the long apprenticeship with a *mestre*. *Mestres*, on the contrary, try to keep upcoming teachers under as tight and long supervision as possible. It seems that expanding hierarchies are a necessary outcome of the intensive growth of capoeira. Most groups have introduced a number of designations for the new, intermediate stages that lead from *formado* to *mestre*. Teachers are thus called *instrutores*, *monitores*, *professores*, or *treinéis*. Abadá even invented the *mestrandos*, students considered of master level, but without the formal *mestre* title, reserved until very recently for the founders of the group.

Relationships between *mestres* are complex and ambivalent. The *mestres* fight for hegemony over the capoeira universe but also cooperate and negotiate for the growth of the art or other communitary ideals. By all means they constitute models of behaviour, and exercise considerable influence in contemporary society given the growing number of *capoeiristas* they are instructing. Very often that influence goes beyond the classroom, and the mere teaching of physical movements, since many capoeira styles claim to be holistic art forms encompassing all realms of life.

The extension of a *mestre*’s power within a group varies enormously. Some groups have relatively open structures, where students also have a say in how the organization is run. In other groups the *mestre* is a kind of absolute monarch, who will not tolerate any divergent views and potential challengers. With regards to power structures it seems that African, European and Native American traditions also merged, and, forged by the experience of colonial exploitation and slavery, resulted in the emergence of a particular type of local despot—the *caciques* and *coronéis*, as they are known in Brazil. As everywhere else in Brazilian society, these figures also exist in the capoeira universe. Yet libertarian movements have also made their attempts to build organizations in capoeira. A number of groups today have not only formal, but truly democratic procedures. In many groups, collective bodies, such as the council of *mestres* and teachers, debate questions of style and aim to reach a consensus.<sup>176</sup> How to accommodate different models of relationships (hierarchical or circular models), each of which are appropriate to specific situations, within one group is a question that still remains to be solved.<sup>177</sup> Egalitarian structures have been claimed more intensively with the recent democratization of Brazilian society. The development of capoeira groups thus reflects the many tortuous paths the country is taking towards a more democratic and egalitarian society, and that applies to groups outside Brazil as well.



## Conclusion: the contemporary meanings of capoeira

Sometimes they call me a Negro  
Thinking they will humiliate me  
But what they don't know  
Is that it only reminds me  
That I come from that race  
Which fought for its freedom [...]  
Capoeira powerful weapon  
A struggle of liberation  
Whites and blacks in the *roda*  
Hug each other like brothers  
I ask: Comrade, what is mine?  
It is my brother [...]  
(Capoeira 'litany' by M.Luis Renato Vieira,  
popular in contemporary *rodas*).<sup>1</sup>

Compared to its distant African ancestors and its immediate Brazilian predecessors, the meanings of contemporary capoeira have expanded, as the game is played in a wider range of social contexts. From street *rodas* to fitness centres, from therapy rooms to film stages, from tourist shows to the internet, capoeira assumes multiple forms. And although historic forms of combat games already contained various modalities, these have been further driven apart in contemporary styles. Capoeira as fighting, capoeira as sport, capoeira as show and capoeira as art abides to different rules. Although one can identify some overarching links between these modalities, each of them entails its own specific meaning. It is thus doubtful whether ecumenical efforts to 'unite the art' will ever be fruitful. The variety of contexts and modalities, and capoeira's growing appeal around the world, show that it can accommodate diversity precisely because it has always done so.

Initially capoeira was closely linked to the history of, and the resistance against slavery. As today's *capoeiristas* rightly emphasize, it became a weapon in the conflict with the police agents of the slave order. As a slave and freedmen's pastime it also increased the chances of surviving harsh labour and difficult living conditions, and enjoying, even though only for an ephemeral moment, the taste of liberty. As M.Pastinha taught, capoeira was the 'slave *mandinga* [witchcraft] in the quest for freedom'. Although the slave system as such has disappeared, many adepts still subscribe to that aim, seeking through practice their emancipation from any kind of oppression. At the same time, what appears today as a therapeutic function

was already present in the times of slavery and it did not necessarily clash with the slave order. Capoeira was thus always more than just a weapon used by slaves. Furthermore, capoeira contributed to the configuration of the slave community and the redrafting of ethnic and social boundaries.

Capoeira therefore worked—according to the specific context—both as a tool for open resistance and as an instrument of low-profile resistance, of lower-class ‘infrapolitics’. However, despite causing permanent headaches to police chiefs during the Brazilian Empire, capoeira did not function as an unambiguous weapon of class struggle. Slaves never constituted a homogenous class, and fault lines in slave society did not always neatly oppose black slaves on one side and white owners on the other. Capoeira was a deadly weapon that could be appropriated by whoever was willing either to learn the techniques or to employ its adepts. Hence it was used as a device by urban gangs of thugs and gunmen in the service of the powerful. *Capoeiras* entered military barracks and the militia, and went to new battlefields wearing the uniforms of the Brazilian Empire. Yet the infiltration of state institutions also resulted in capoeira’s dependence from that particular regime and provoked its demise as an independent art. The regime change of 1889 thus eradicated most of the culture of capoeira in Rio de Janeiro.

Bahian *capoeiras*, in contrast, were less systematically involved in local politics and preserved more of its rituals and traditions—up to the present. Its epic tales allowed adepts to re-enact the valiant struggles of the past. Capoeira heroes (or anti-heroes) from Bahia continue to provide role models for younger generations. Capoeira taught adepts how to indulge in the art of vagrancy, and how they could fool the establishment. The aim of Bahian *capoeiras* was to survive using—not overthrowing—the system. At the same time, practitioners learned elaborate body techniques and rituals, which were transmitted by older *mestres* but also re-invented by each generation. Furthermore, through *vadição* adepts developed their musical and poetic skills.

No doubt the anti-clockwise circle of the *roda* with its rituals often carried transcendental meaning for adepts. Capoeira developed in a society where faith was central to people’s preoccupations and religious practices were deeply embedded in everyday life. That spiritual meaning, however, evolved according to the social context. ‘Prehistoric’ (because undocumented) forms of capoeira and other African combat games possibly included dialogue with transatlantic ancestors. Yet these meanings are neither documented for combat games in Central Africa prior to the twentieth century nor did they survive in the Diaspora. Of course capoeira retained in Brazil, and in Bahia in particular, strong connections to slave religious practices. But slaves and their descendents practised different religions and worshipped many gods, and thus no unique, all embracing religious meaning was ever attached to capoeira practice in Brazil. The idea of capoeira as an ancestral cult of ‘crossing the *kalunga*’, is based on present-day knowledge of Central African religious traditions, and was re-invented by Afrocentric militants in the United States during the 1990s. Hence it represents one of the new, contemporary meanings of globalized capoeira.

The modernization of capoeira resulted in a fragmentation not only of styles but also of its social functions. Former meanings did not disappear altogether, but shifted, and new ones emerged, associating and overlapping with older ones. Contemporary capoeira can still be a deadly weapon. The art provides advanced practitioners with a powerful tool of self-defence and enhances their self-assurance, both of which are useful assets in the jungle of our cities. Capoeira always helped to maintain form and more generally the good health of its adepts. It is well known that *capoeiristas* who regularly practise can do so until a very advanced age. Modernization has meant that sportive and therapeutic functions are not only more explicitly recognized and analysed, but also that the art was taken out of its traditional context (the *roda*), to the ‘academies’, and, subsequently, to the therapy rooms in order to fulfil these specific purposes. One of the new meanings capoeira acquired in the context of modern society is to preserve bodily skills familiar in ‘traditional’ societies, which have been lost in the process of modernization. Marcel Mauss already

lamented that Europeans had unlearned how to crouch and considered it a gross mistake not to allow children using the squatting position they naturally adopt.<sup>2</sup> Since capoeira allows adepts to (re)learn how to crouch or walk on their hands it can also be understood as a practice that compensates for some of the drawbacks of modernization.

The meaning of modern capoeira styles is not only a different emphasis on each aspect of the art (fight, dance, theatre, game), but also to provide adepts with different answers to the same basic questions about the meanings of past and present, and the right balance between continuity and change. Capoeira can thus be viewed as a kind of discourse about fundamental philosophical issues, and the *roda*, styles and songs provide the place for adepts to take position and engage in a dialogue with each other. Hence M. Camisa and the Abadá group defend that innovation is necessary for the preservation of tradition. Their manifesto asserts: 'For capoeira and the chameleon, change is only to preserve its essence.'<sup>3</sup> Other *mestres* express very different views on the chameleon and use it for other colour metaphors of 'race' and nation. M. Moraes for instance sings: 'I am not a chameleon. But I can be full of colour. The lizard is Brazilian. He walks in green and yellow'.<sup>4</sup> The game between players in the *roda* is thus mirrored at another level as a philosophical dialogue between different positions regarding the fundamental issue of continuity and change. Adepts thus use the *ladainha* as a meta-discourse about capoeira, and about the greater *roda*, or circle of life.

One key reason why people today practise capoeira is simply that it is so much fun. Playing capoeira in a *roda* always brought pleasure to adepts. This is true not only in terms of the thrill that every game provides, but also in terms of an overall physical and mental good feeling. Doctors still have to provide more details about how the 'capoeira trance' (*transe capoeirano*) stimulates the production of endorphines, but there is little doubt that it enhances practitioners' well being. The more transcendental meanings some adepts attach to capoeira can equally help them to find to their own centre. Yet the kind of enjoyment practitioners look for has changed over time. As a game (*jogo* or *brincadeira*) it traditionally expressed African derived or Afro-Brazilian sociability, an incredibly efficient way to escape from the hardships of slavery or unskilled and low paid 'free' labour. This African and slave derived way of playing has, to some extent, been maintained in contemporary practice; but modernization has also significantly altered the meaning of the diversion and the nature of the game.

Today capoeira, especially in its globalized forms, embodies almost to perfection a cool attitude, and that is why the art is used to advertise mobile phones (another icon of coolness) or the BBC and 'cool Britannia'. A cool attitude clashes with what many *mestres* of the older generations teach, hence the conflicts over the appropriation of the art by new groups of capoeira consumers. These generational conflicts do not exclude some form of agreement over basic rules and the possibility to play together in a *roda*. Practitioners of different styles, religious and political backgrounds will also agree that the *roda* helps to concentrate and focus spiritual energy (*axé*). In that widest sense capoeira is—at least for the time being—still a martial art, different from aerobics or bodybuilding activities that merely develop mechanical functions of the body.

The consumer attitude clashes but also contradictorily combines with another fundamental meaning of contemporary capoeira, the formation of identity. As we have seen throughout this book, identity politics have always played a core role in the discussion of what capoeira is all about and in which direction it should evolve. For many African-Americans (I use this term here in the wider meaning of people of African ancestry in the Americas, not—as is the common usage—only in the United States), capoeira expresses the bodily memory of Africans and their enslaved descendants. This view is also shared by many other people who do not consider themselves to be of African ancestry. Thus capoeira simultaneously provides an answer to the search for their own roots for black Brazilians, for Brazilians in general and for people of



African descent in the diaspora. It provides a link with ancestral practices. A capoeira *roda* allows one to log into the homepage of an epic past and a glorious present. As such it is still a powerful marker of ethnic (black), regional (Bahian) and national (Brazilian) identities, despite its expansion to new constituencies that are none of these three. Capoeira therefore offers not only health and fun, but also spirituality in an increasingly secularized world, just as it provides an anchor in a global context of dissolution and crisis of traditional identities of class, gender, ethnicity and nation; hence its popularity in the multicultural metropolises of the twenty-first century. Identities are defined in terms of the whole art (to be a capoeirista), a specific style (for example to be an angoleiro), or a particular group. They are expressed in many ways, from songs to T-shirts.

Globalization produces the dislocation of peoples and cultures. Growing fluxes of parcels and passengers undermine the idea of culture being firmly rooted in a particular soil. Feeling of distance from one's 'original' location of culture can result in the search of one's roots, but also fuel exoticism. That is why the development of capitalism in nineteenth-century Europe was accompanied by the growth of travel literature and the interest in anthropological descriptions of 'natives' in distant continents. During the twentieth century, exoticism—although now to a large extent commodified by the tourist industry—remains a kind of inverted pursuit from the search for one's own 'roots', the search for an imaginary homeland, where human beings are still in a state of nature, unpolluted and without guilt, just like animals. Maybe this is another reason why animal metaphors—chameleons, zebras, snakes, monkeys and birds—continue to be so powerful in contemporary capoeira. They also help to define one's own posture in the debate over the wider meaning of capoeira or the very concrete way in which a game evolves in a *roda*.

The term globalization is commonly used to suggest that the process is a recent, late twentieth-century development. In fact, one can hardly imagine a more momentous process of dislocation of peoples and cultures than the one produced by the slave trade for almost four centuries. The difference is that it happened outside Europe in distant colonies; metropolitan cultures only superficially acknowledged the social and cultural impact of the slave trade. They were not directly involved in the way they are now, when the metropolises themselves have become multicultural societies. That is why metropolitan cultures now need diasporic forms such as capoeira, which have accumulated a long experience of how to accommodate cultural diversity whilst still preserving a core identity.

Outside Brazil, capoeira adepts often come from multicultural backgrounds and they are the ones who seem to incorporate more rapidly the basic *ginga* than mono-lingual students. Practitioners from monocultural background often struggle hard to grasp the meaning of what they are doing, because they are not familiar with cultural translation. Adepts with their own diasporic biography, in contrast, are typically forced to develop flexibility in terms of value-system, precisely what constitutes the 'flexible waist' (*jogo de cintura*) in capoeira or wider Brazilian popular culture.

A creole, transatlantic practice such as capoeira is therefore particularly apt to provide an overarching identity for diasporic people of any descent. A diaspora presupposes the existence of a real or imaginary homeland to which its members aspire to return. The more globalized capitalism destroys and commodifies 'original cultures', the more people feel uprooted, and the more they start searching for 'authenticity'. That is why the search for one's 'roots' has become so important today, and essentialists of all sorts enjoy growing sympathy in many audiences. Yet, to paraphrase a slogan from postcolonial studies, more important than the supposed roots of are the *routes* through which capoeira developed. Given that capoeira has not only survived repression, conquered legality, and grown so much ever since, one can indeed say, that the golden age of capoeira lies not in a distant past when the art was more 'authentic', but, as Nestor Capoeira rightly asserts, the golden age of capoeira is today!<sup>5</sup>

The impressive proliferation of the practice around the world obviously raises the question to what extent capoeira can still express Afro-Brazilian values. No doubt that capoeira's globalization and transformation into a capitalist commodity contribute to a dilution of its 'original' meanings and undermines its 'authenticity'. On the other hand, people around the world playing Afro-Brazilian instruments, singing Portuguese songs composed by slaves and their descendants and moving according to African-derived aesthetics remains a major achievement in a world dominated by Hollywood, Nike, Sony, Coca-Cola and Microsoft. Brazilian capoeira instructors teaching gringos the *ginga* are thus the effective ambassadors of African-derived, Bahian and Brazilian culture. This remains true even if capoeira is also permanently co-opted and hijacked by corporations such as Nokia or the BBC. That is not a new development. Furthermore, the use of capoeira to advertise other products also helps the art to gain more recognition and to increase its symbolic capital.

Throughout this book I have often questioned the idea that capoeira has always and only been a tool against 'the' oppressor, and attempted to show that the insertion of the art in each specific historical context was more complex than the simple dichotomy accommodation versus resistance can account for. The apology of vagrancy constitutes a negation of dominant values, but still remains within parameters of dominant discourse. The *malandro* is not a revolutionary. Elite politicians or corporations use capoeira to win elections or sell products. Thus the art is constantly hijacked by different social actors to serve purposes alien to its 'original' meanings. Does that indicate capoeira is co-opted and mainstreamed once and for all?

All practitioners still repeat the 'mantra' of capoeira as cultural resistance—interestingly enough regardless of their individual style. Even though the institutionalization and commodification of the practice allows deconstructing this affirmation in many instances, the very insistence on resistance by adepts remains meaningful. Resistance is as much a question of intention as of objective criteria, and as such needs to be taken seriously. Perhaps one should not interpret resistance in the sense of a total refusal, as a rejection of acculturation or of any outside influence. Capoeira has always adapted to changing contexts by re-appropriating external elements, from both subaltern and hegemonic cultures. Yet the acculturation urban capoeira went through was not a one-sided process of accommodation to dominant structures in contrast to, for instance, the heroic resistance of maroons in the backlands. As I have tried to show, creolization and acculturation entailed a number of different processes, which do not fit easily into a rigid opposition between resistance and accommodation. Acculturation is not necessarily a totalizing process leading to accommodation, but 'has rather to be understood as the use of a resource, often only partially utilized'.<sup>6</sup>

The strict dichotomy between resistance and accommodation does not allow an understanding of the more subtle mechanisms through which individual adepts and capoeira groups interact with dominant, hegemonic structures. The dialectics of structure and agency are perhaps better grasped through alternative concepts such as re-appropriation and self-affirmation. Re-appropriation does not necessarily include identification with the adopted elements and their inherent value system. As a matter of fact, successful self-affirmation often incorporates alien elements and values.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout history, capoeira has, by means of re-appropriation and self-affirmation, brought people together and conquered social space. Here lies one of its most important, even though not often recognized meanings. Capoeira might not be directly significant for party politics, but it is so for the politics of gender and race. Capoeira often constituted an alternative 'black space', where dominant values of white superiority did—as a general rule—not prevail. The institutionalization of the art has undermined that aspect, but in some respects it always was and still is an advantage to be black in *rodas* past and present. This means both black and white adepts learn to behave according to alternative models of inter-ethnic relations. Capoeira thus provides a space for the apprenticeship of equality and racial democracy. Therefore it contributes to develop citizenship and to make racial democracy less of a myth and more of an every day

reality. The recent admission of women as full equivalents to male players has extended capoeira's emancipating role even further to include gender equality (despite the existence, at the same time, of gender discrimination in the capoeira universe). Thus contemporary capoeira fulfils a core requirement of modern as opposed to 'traditional' sports: equality.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond the politics of human rights capoeira represents the apprenticeship of the freedom of movement and the theatricality it develops contributes to enhance group interaction. Capoeira, in all its diverse and divergent meanings, represents thus an important Afro-Brazilian contribution to world culture. Adepts and styles can be labelled as traditionalist or modernizing, Afro-centric or Brazilian nationalist, black or white, antagonistic or playful, but again these oppositions are often too simplistic. In capoeira many different levels of meaning intersect to form a complex web of signification. At its core, however, are the game and its aesthetics. There seems to be a consensus above all controversies and styles that capoeira is, ultimately, an art. Capoeira practice is a quest for beauty, which every adept pursues in one form or the other. And if the notion of what is beautiful differ, does it matter? As the old capoeira *corrido* goes:

Aidé, Aide!  
 Play beautiful, for people to see!  
 Aidé, Aide!  
 Play beautiful, for me to learn!

Hopefully this book contributes to a better understanding of the history of our game. I would appreciate your criticisms and comments at: [matthias\\_capoeira@yahoo.com.br](mailto:matthias_capoeira@yahoo.com.br)

Bye-bye, bye-bye  
 Have a good trip!  
 Bye-bye, bye-bye  
 I am going  
 Bye-bye, bye-bye  
 I'm going with Our Lord  
 Bye-bye, bye-bye  
 I'm going with Our Lady

# Glossary

- Abadá** 1 Tunics used by Muslim slaves for prayer, 2 Working cloth of port workers, 3 Capoeira uniform.
- Agogô** Metal bell, instrument of the capoeira orchestra.
- Angoleiros** Practitioners of the traditionalist capoeira, Angola style.
- Atabaque** Drum used in Afro-Brazilian religion and entertainment.
- Au** ‘Cartwheel’, a capoeira movement.
- Axe** Divine energy in AfroBrazilian religion.
- Balão** Acrobatic movement whereby one capoeira player is thrown over the other’s shoulder or head with a somersault.
- Bamba** A ‘tough guy’.
- Bassula** Wrestling practised by fishermen on the northern coast of Angola.
- Bate-coxa** Variation of *samba duro*, where contenders attempt to overthrow each other to the music of *samba*.
- Bateria** 1 Samba orchestra, 2 Capoeira orchestra.
- Batuque** 1 Colonial, generic denomination for African and Afro-Brazilian drumming and dancing, 2 A combat game in Bahia, 3 Afro-Brazilian religion in South Brazil.
- Batuque-boi** Local variant of the combat game *batuque*.
- Batuqueiro** Practitioner of *batuque*.
- Berimbau** Musical bow of central African origin, key instrument of twentieth-century capoeira.
- Berra-boi** Another term for the *berimbau*, usually that with the deepest sound (*gunga*).
- Brincadeira** Play, and, by extension, the capoeira game.
- Budo** The ensemble of modern Japanese martial arts.
- Cabeçada** Head butt used in capoeira and other combat games of the Black Atlantic.
- Cabra** 1 A goat, 2 A dark-skinned mulatto, 3 A tough guy.
- Calinda** Combination of stick fighting and dancing in Trinidad.
- Candomblé** 1 Afro-Bahian, and, by extension, 2 Afro-Brazilian religion.
- Cantiga de sotaque** A variation of the initial capoeira song (*ladainha*), for two players, rather than one, improvising verses alternatively to challenge each other.
- Canto** A street corner, where slaves ‘for hire’ gathered waiting for clients.
- Canto de entrada.** The capoeira song that follows immediately the *ladainha*, also known as *reza*, *chula* or *louvação*.
- Capadócio** 1 A vagrant, 2 A *capoeira*.
- Capoeira** 1 The martial art (not italicized in the text), 2 A nineteenth-century term for the practitioner of capoeira (italicized in the text).
- Capoeira Angola** since the 1930s denominates the traditional style of capoeira as played in Bahia (see Chapter 6).
- Capoeiragem** A nineteenth-century synonym for capoeira, the martial art.
- Capoeirista** The contemporary term for a capoeira practitioner.
- Carioca** An inhabitant of Rio de Janeiro.
- Carrapeta** Young apprentice capoeira in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, synonym for *caxinguelê*.
- Catimbó** Magical practice of northern Brazil, mainly used for healing.
- Caxinguelê** Young apprentice capoeira in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro.
- Caxixi** A kind of rattle made of straw filled with beans, part of the *berimbau*.
- Chamada** ‘Call’, ritual interruption of normal game in some capoeira styles.
- Chapa de costa** Backward kick in capoeira Angola.

**Chapa de frente** Frontal kick in capoeira Angola.

**Chibata** ‘Whip’, a capoeira attack.

**Chula** Type of capoeira song. Usually follows the *ladainha*, and consists of praises and exhortations by the lead singer, repeated by the chorus. Also called *canto de entrada* or *louvação*.

**Congada** The dramatic dance and festivities that accompany the election of a Congo king and queen, organized by black brotherhoods in Brazil since colonial times.

**Contra-mestre** Aspiring mestre, intermediary stage between advanced student and *mestre*.

**Corrido** The song that accompanies the capoeira game, consisting of a solo verse and a chorus.

**Cortiço** Tenement, usually a delapidated townhouse with small rooms rented out to poor people.

**Cufuinha** War dance and mock combat performed in the Lunda Empire in central Africa. First described by Henrique Dias de Carvalho (1890).

**Cutilada** Hand blow used in some capoeira styles.

**Danmyé** A friendlier form of *ladja* in Martinique.

**Dendê** Palm oil used in West African, Caribbean and Bahian cuisine.

**Desordeiro** A troublemaker.

**Efundula** Female puberty ceremonies in southern Angola, during which some forms of mock combat took place between young men.

**Engenho** A (sugar) mill, and, by extension, the whole sugar plantation.

**Escravo de ganho** A slave ‘for hire’ whose services are sold by his owner.

**Fazenda** A big estate—plantation or cattle ranch—in Brazil. Most *fazendas* used slave labour until abolition in 1888.

**Filha de santo** ‘Daughter of Saints’, a women initiated into *candomblé*.

**Fundamentos** 1 The core knowledge of *candomblé*, 2 The core knowledge of capoeira.

**Galego** An inhabitant of Gálícia, Spain, by extension any Portuguese immigrant to Brazil.

**Galopante** Hand punch used in capoeira Regional.

**Garrote** Venezuelan art of stick fighting, especially prominent in the state of Lara.

**Ginga** Basic step in capoeira, consists in rhythmically moving from one side to the other.

**Godeme** One-handed punch used in capoeira Regional.

**Gunga** The *berimbau* with the deepest sound in the capoeira orchestra, usually the one which controls the rhythm.

**Inquice** Deity in *candomblés* of the *Angola* line.

**Jogo** A game in capoeira.

**Jogo de cintura** The ‘flexible waist’, which allows good capoeira performance; by extension, the ability to adapt and react to unforeseen circumstances.

**Jogo de dentro** ‘Inside game’ in capoeira, when practitioners play at close range.

**Jogo de floreio** An elegant game, which uses all the acrobatic resources of capoeira, but without full contact.

**Jogo do pau** Portuguese art of stick fighting.

**Jujutsu** ‘The art of softness’. One line of traditional Japanese combat techniques.

**Kalunga** In Kongo/Angola this term had several meanings: God; the world of the ancestors; the rivers and the sea. ‘Crossing the *kalunga*’ could mean the transatlantic journey, but also referred to the line between this world and the world of the spirits or ancestors.

**Kixila** Strict rules to which the Imbangala warriors living in Angolan *quilombos* had to abide. The *kixila* included symbolic and possibly actual forms of cannibalism and infanticide.

**Ladainha** ‘Litany’, the introductory song in traditional capoeira.

**Ladja** Combat game in Martinique whose techniques strongly resemble capoeira.

**Liveta** According to Neves e Souza, an open-hand fight that preceded the *n’golo*.

**Louvação** ‘Praise’, another term for *chula*, the capoeira song that follows the initial *ladainha*.

**Lundu** 1 Dance in the hinterland of Luanda, 2 Musical genre that developed in Brazil from the *batuque* of the slaves; the *lundu* is characterized by longer songs and more emphasis on the *viola*.

- Maculelê** Dance from Santo Amaro (Bahia) which performs a mock stick fight; it has been adopted by capoeira groups as a form of exercise and is also often used in capoeira performances.
- Macumba** 1 Afro-Brazilian religion in Rio de Janeiro, 2 Derogative term for African-derived ‘witchcraft’.
- Malandragem** Deception, cunning.
- Malandro** Rogue, spiv.
- Malícia** Cunning, shrewdness, one key quality of capoeira players.
- Malta** A gang, and, in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, a common term for a capoeira gang.
- Mandinga** 1 A people in West Africa (also Mandinka or Mandingo), 2 Witchcraft, sorcery; 3 Spiritual power and cunning in capoeira.
- Mandingueiro** Someone who has *mandinga*, e.g. who knows how to use witchcraft or who knows how to use cunning and malice when playing capoeira.
- Maneiro pau** Stick fighting technique from Ceará, Brazil.
- Maní** Combat game with fists in Cuba, now extinct.
- Martelo** ‘Hammer’, a capoeira kick.
- Meia lua** ‘Half-moon’, a capoeira attack.
- Meia lua virada** ‘Turned half moon’, a kick similar to the *queixada* used in the capoeira Regional style.
- Mestre** Master, teacher of capoeira.
- Mestre de bateria** The person in charge of the capoeira orchestra.
- Mgba** Wrestling practised among the Igbo, Nigeria.
- Modinha** Nineteenth-century musical genre in Brazil, consisting of a song accompanied by a guitar.
- Moleque** Kimbundo word used in Brazil for a young, usually black, boy.
- Morengy** Term used for a variety of combat games in Madagascar; most forms rely on bare-knuckle boxing as a basic fighting technique, but some styles also allow feet kicking techniques, and in some case only fighting with feet is permitted. See the descriptions by Powe (*Combat Games*, 2001).
- Moringue** Combat game practised on the island of Réunion until the 1950s, revitalized after 1989, attributed to the slaves brought to the island to work on French plantations; contrary to most of its cognates on Comoros and Madagascar, *moringue* only uses kicks, but not punches and many of its movements strongly resemble those of capoeira.
- Mrenyé** A combat game using fists, kicks, grabbing and head butts practised on the Comoros Islands in the Indian Ocean.
- N’golo** The mythical ancestor of capoeira in Angola. See [Chapter 2](#).
- Negativa** ‘negation’, a basic, defensive movement in capoeira to avoid a kick.
- Oba** A sacred ruler in Yoruba territories, Nigeria.
- Ogã** A honorific title given to important supporters of a *candomblé* shrine.
- Omudinho** Acrobatic exercise among the Quilengues of Angola, which consisted in throwing the legs into the air and the head downwards; first mentioned in an early twentieth-century report.
- Orixá (or orisha)** Yoruba/Nago deity in Afro-Brazilian religion.
- Pajelança** Ritual practice of Brazilian indian origins; the *pajé* uses his powers to heal, predict the future or ask for protection.
- Pandeiro** Tambourine used in the capoeira orchestra.
- Pardo** 1 A mulatto, and by extension, 2 Any person of mixed ancestry.
- Patuá** Amulet, fetish.
- Peneirar** A capoeira technique that consists of confusing the opponent through constant movement.
- Pernada** 1 Local variant of the Bahian combat game *batuque*, 2 In Rio de Janeiro, also known as *pernada carioca*.
- Povo de santo** ‘People of the saints’, practitioners of *candomblé*.
- Quadra** A type of capoeira song, consisting of a short solo followed by call and response; unlike the *ladainha*, it can be performed without stopping the game.
- Queixada** Attack used in capoeira Regional and other contemporary styles.



**Quilombo** Community of runaway slaves or maroons.

**Rabo de arraia** ‘Stingray’s tail’, a capoeira kick.

**Rasteira** Sweeping counter-attack in capoeira.

**Recoreco** A scraper, instrument of the capoeira orchestra.

**Regional, or capoeira Regional** The style developed by M.Bimba (see [Chapter 5](#)).

**Reza** 1 A prayer, 2 In capoeira, a synonym for the *canto de entrada* or *louvação*.

**Roda** The circle, where the capoeira game takes place.

**Samba** Dance and music of central African origins; many variants of samba developed in the different regions of Brazil.

**Samba de roda** Traditional Bahian form of samba, where dancers form a circle (*roda*) and two of them execute steps in the middle.

**Samba duro** Local variant of the combat game *batuque*.

**Sangamento** Military reviews through which pre-colonial rulers in Angola ensured their troops were well prepared and had the necessary fighting morale.

**Savate** French martial art which uses fist punches and kicks.

**Saveiro** A type of sailing ship common in Bahia.

**Sertão** Distant hinterland, and more specifically the semi-arid interior of northeast Brazil.

**Soba** Local ruler in Angola.

**Talon zirondelles** Strike with the heel of the foot in the combat game from Réunion, *moringue*; strongly resembles the capoeira technique known as *rabo de arraia* or *meia lua de compasso*.

**Telefone** Two-handed punch used in capoeira Regional.

**Terreiro** The shrine where Afro-Brazilian gods are worshipped; by extension, the group of followers and the organization of the cult.

**Tesoura** ‘Scissors’, a capoeira attack.

**Toque** Rhythmic-melodic pattern in capoeira and other Afro-Brazilian manifestations.

**Umbanda** Syncretic religion derived from Afro-Brazilian, Catholic and European esoteric traditions.

**Umbigada** ‘Belly bounce’, a movement that exists in many Central African dances, and also in some Brazilian dances such as the nineteenth-century *batuque* and the contemporary *tambor de crioula*.

**Vadiação** Vagrancy, in Bahia the term also signifies the capoeira game.

**Vadiar** 1 Being idle, and by extension, 2 Playing capoeira, 3 Dancing and incorporating the gods in a *candomblé de caboclo* (Bahia).

**Valentao** A tough guy.

**Viola** 1 A guitar, 2 A violin, 3 The *berimbau* with the highest sound in the capoeira orchestra.

**Vodun** Jeje (Ewe-Fon) deity in Afro-Brazilian religion.

**Zungu** A townhouse inhabited exclusively by slaves and free blacks

# Notes

## Series editor's foreword

- 1 Thomas A.Green and Joseph R.Svinth (eds), *Martial Arts in the Modern World* (London: Praeger, 2003), p. xi.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid., p. xiii.
- 4 This volume, p. 3.
- 5 Ibid., p. 1.
- 6 John Buchan, *Montrose* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 423.

## Introduction

- 1 As translated by G.Downey, 'Incorporating Capoeira: Phenomenology of a Movement Discipline' (PhD thesis, Anthropology, University of Chicago, 1998), p. 91.
- 2 As sung by Alex Muniz on the CD João Pequeno de Pastinha (Salvador: WR Discos, 2000).
- 3 *Revista Capoeira*, Vol. II, No. 4, p. 4.
- 4 Research done on 21 February 2003.
- 5 'Auntie cuts hot air to create new image', *The Guardian*, 27 March 2002.
- 6 The Middle Passage stands for the second trip in the 'triangular trade' between Europe, Africa and the Americas, when African slaves were forced to embark on overcrowded slave-ships and deported to the plantation colonies of the 'New World'.
- 7 Downey, 'Incorporating Capoeira', p. 121.

## 1

### The competing master narratives of capoeira history

- 1 'A capoeira assim foi criada', *Jornal da Capoeira*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (São Paulo: Arthgraph, 1996), p. 8; reprinted in *Revista Capoeira*, No. 1 (1998), p. 46. Capoeira here refers to the Tupi (native Brazilian) term for a clearing in the forest where secondary vegetation is growing.
- 2 S.L.de Souza Vieira, 'Capoeira—Matriz Cultural Para um Educação Física Brasileira' (MA thesis, São Paulo: PUC, Ciências Sociais, 1997).
- 3 See for example L.Pereira da Costa, *Capoeiragem. A arte da defesa pessoal brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: n.e., 1961) p. 11; A.das Areias, *O que é capoeira* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1984), pp. 13, 15–17; M. Burguês, *O estudo da capoeira* (5th edn, n.p., author's edition, 1987), p. 2.
- 4 See for example *Artes Marciais*, special issue 'Capoeira', n.d., *Jornal da Capoeira*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (São Paulo, 1996), p. 8.

- 5 Areias, *O que é capoeira*, pp. 15, 16.
- 6 Ibid., p. 17.
- 7 T.J.Desch-Obi, 'Capoeira: Martial Art as a Spiritual Discipline', *Journal of Caribbean Studies* (1992), p. 88; L.V.de Sousa Reis, *O mundo de pernas para o ar. A capoeira no Brasil* (São Paulo: Publisher Brasil, 1997), p. 23.
- 8 T.J.Nardi, 'Kapwara: The Afro-Brazilian martial art that features everything from zebra strikes to kicks with a Sharp Surprise!', *World of Martial Arts* (March/April 1996), p. 34.
- 9 See LP cover of capoeira record by Mestre Nagô; S.G.Wilson, *The Drummer's Path. Moving the Spirit with Ritual and Traditional Drumming* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1992), illustration p. 24.
- 10 R.F.Thompson, comment on LP *Capoeira. Afro-Brazilian Art Form. Mestre Jelon [Vieira], featuring Grandmasters João Grande, Bobó, João Pequeno* (New York: The Capoeira Foundation, 1989).
- 11 Areias, *O que é Capoeira*, p. 21.
- 12 For an excellent overview of available sources on slavery, see *Guia Brasileiro de fontes para a história da África, da escravidão negra e do negro na sociedade atual* (Brasília, Ministério da Justiça, Arquivo Nacional, Departamento de Imprensa Nacional, 1988). See also A.J.Lacombe, E.Silva, F.de Assis Barbosa, *Rui Barbosa e a queima dos arquivos* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa, 1988).
- 13 R.Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972) p. 143.
- 14 T.H.Holloway, *Polidng Rio de Janeiro. Repression and Resistance in a Nineteenth Century City* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 29.
- 15 P.Coêlho de Araujo has however found legislation (*posturas*) from the 1830s–1850s issued by various towns in the province of São Paulo that explicitly forbade 'the practice or exercise of the game called capoeira'. *Abordagens sócio-antropológicas da luta/jogo da capoeira* (Maia, Portugal: Instituto Superior da Maia, 1997), pp. 148–50.
- 16 As quoted in L.da Câmara Cascudo, *Dicionário do Folclore Brasileiro* (3rd edn, Rio de Janeiro: Tecnoprint, 1972), p. 241.
- 17 Machado de Assis, *Crônicas (1859–1888)* (Porto Alegre: Jackson Inc., 1944), Vol. 4, pp. 227–30.
- 18 See E.Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and the discussion of the Brazilian case in M.Chauí, *Brasil. Mito fundador e sociedade autoritdria* (São Paulo: Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2000), p. 16ff.
- 19 I choose here two dates which not only reflect European chronology but also delimit the Brazilian period of decolonization from the first anti-colonial conspiracy (Minas Gerais, 1789) to the end of the cycle of regionalist and radical liberal uprisings (Pernambuco, 1848).
- 20 D.Moreira Leite, *O caráter nacional brasikiro. História de uma Ideologia* (2nd edn, São Paulo: Pioneira, 1969) remains a key text on this topic.
- 21 Moreira Leite, *O caráter nacional* provides a valuable periodization of the Brazilian search for the national character.
- 22 T.Skidmore, *Black into White. Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, *O espetáculo das raças. Cientistas, instituições e questão racial no Brasil, 1870–1930* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1993).
- 23 K.Munanga, *Rediscutindo a mestiçagem no Brasil. Identidade nacional versus identidade negra* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1999).
- 24 'How the History of Brazil Should be Written', in Lewis Hanke (ed.) *History of Latin American Civilization. Sources and Interpretation* (London: Methuen, 1969), Vol. 1, p. 501.
- 25 B.E.Burns, *Nationalism in Brazil* (New York: Frederick A.Praeger, 1968), p. 55.
- 26 Chauí, *Brasil. Mito fundador e sociedade autoritária*, p. 27.
- 27 For a more detailed discussion of these issues, see J.Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity. Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).
- 28 Abreu, Plácido de, *Os capoeiras*, Rio de Janeiro: Tipografia da Escola de Serafim José Alves, 1886, p. 3.

- 29 Marta Abreu, *O Império do Divino. Festas religiosas e cultura popular no Rio de Janeiro, 1830–1900* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1999), pp. 144–61 provides an excellent appraisal of Mello Moraes' work.
- 30 *Festas populares do Brasil—tradicionalismo*, published in 1888, was the first version of *Festas e tradições populares no Brasil*, published in 1901.
- 31 Mello Moraes, *Festas* (Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia, 1979), pp. 257–63.
- 32 Letícia Vidor de Sousa Reis, *O mundo de pernas para o ar. A capoeira no Brasil* (São Paulo: Publisher Brazil, 1997), pp. 83–6.
- 33 Azevedo, A., *O cortiço* (1st edn, Paris and Rio de Janeiro: Garnier, 1890).
- 34 L.C., 'A Capoeira', *Kosmos*, 3 (March 1906), no pagination. Jair Moura identified LC with the writer Lima Campos, see 'O mestiço e a capoeiragem carioca', *Revista Capoeira*, No. 2 (1998), pp. 40–1.
- 35 P.M.Beattie, 'The House, the Street, and the Barracks: Reform and Honourable Masculine Social Space in Brazil, 1864–1945', *HAHR*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (1996), pp. 456–7.
- 36 C.Castro, 'In corpore sano—Os militares e a introdução da educação física no Brasil', *Antropolítica, Revista Contemporânea de Antropologia e Ciência Política*, UFF, 2 (1997), pp. 63–5.
- 37 O.D.C., *Guia do capoeira ou ginástica brasileira*, Rio de Janeiro, 1907 as quoted in I.P.Marinho, *Sub sídios para o estudo da metodologia do treinamento da capoeiragem* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1945), p. 29. Unfortunately this item has disappeared from the National Library. The Capoeira Association Barravento (Niterói) has circulated a copy based on the typed notes taken by Burlamaqui prior to the loss of the original.
- 38 Coelho Neto, *Bazar* (Porto: Liv. Chardon de Lello e Irmão, 1928), p. 139.
- 39 Skidmore, *Black into White*, p. 90.
- 40 Coelho Neto, *Bazar*, pp. 133–4; W. Rego, *Capoeira Angola. Ensaio sócio-etnográfico* (Salvador: Itapuã, 1968), p. 262.
- 41 See the summary in Jair Moura, 'Subsídios para uma visão retrospectiva da capoeiragem no Rio de Janeiro', *Revista de Capoeira*, Vol. II, No. 6 (1999), pp. 44–5.
- 42 A.Gomes Cartusc, 'Cultivemos o jogo da capoeira e tenhamos asco pelo da box', *O Paiz*, 22 October 1923, as reproduced in *Negaça*, Vol. II, No. 2, pp. 3–6.
- 43 A.Morales de los Rios Filho, *O Rio de Janeiro imperial* (Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks, 2000), p. 73. This book reproduces material from the 1920s–1930s and was first published in 1946.
- 44 Luiz Edmundo [da Costa], *O Rio de Janeiro no tempo dos vice-reis (1763–1808)* (Rio de Janeiro: Athena, 1936), p. 38.
- 45 Luiz Edmundo, *O Rio de Janeiro*, p. 39.
- 46 I have so far been unable to find dates of birth and death for Burlamaqui.
- 47 A.Burlamaqui (Zuma), *Ginástica nacional (Capoeiragem) metodizada e regrada* (Rio de Janeiro: n.e., 1928), pp. 3, 11–13.
- 48 Leite, *O caráter nacional*, pp. 268–285. The secondary literature on Freyre is voluminous.
- 49 Darlyle Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil. The First Vargas Regime, 1930–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 67–9.
- 50 Ibidem, pp. 52–89.
- 51 Quoted in Castro, 'In corpore sano', pp. 67–70.
- 52 I.P.Marinho, *Subsídios para o estudo da metodologia do treinamento da capoeiragem* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1945), p. 19.
- 53 I.P.Marinho, *Subsídios para a História da Capoeiragem no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Tupy, 1956), pp. 12–13. This piece is to a large extent identical with his previous book.
- 54 Quoted in A.L.Lacé Lopes, *A volta do mundo da capoeira* (Rio de Janeiro: Coregráfica, 1999), pp. 173–5.
- 55 Manoel Querino, *A Bahia de outrora* (Salvador: Livraria Progresso, 1955), pp. 73–5.
- 56 Leite, *O caráter nacional*, p. 216.
- 57 E.Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia* (Rio de Janeiro: Ediouro, n.d.), p. 29.
- 58 Nina Rodrigues, *Os africanos no Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia Nacional, 1977), pp. 215–16.
- 59 Skidmore, *Black into White*, pp. 237–8.

- 60 A.Ramos, *As culturas negras no Novo Mundo* (4th edn, São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1979), p. 246.
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- 64 O.R.de Moraes von Simson (org.), *Revisitando a terra de contrastes: a atualidade da obra de Roger Bastide* (São Paulo: FFLECH/CERU, 1986), pp. 43, 99.
- 65 R.Bastide, *Les Amériques Noires. Les civilisations africaines dans le Nouveau Monde* (Paris: Payot, 1967), pp. 176, 180–3.
- 66 J.Bacelar, *A hierarquia das raças. Negros e brancos em Salvador* (Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 2001), p. 129.
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- 68 Dantas, *Vovô Nago*, pp. 150, 164, 192, 205.
- 69 R.Almeida, 'O brinquedo da capoeira', *Revista do Arquivo Municipal*, Vol. 7, No. 84 (1942), p. 155.
- 70 [Álbano] Neves e Sousa: ...*Da minha África e do Brasil que eu vi...*(Luanda: n.e., n.d.).
- 71 Idem, plates No. 65–7.
- 72 In fact we don't yet know if Neves e Souza already defended the *n'golo* hypothesis while visiting M.Pastinha or if he developed that idea only at a later stage.
- 73 Idem, comments to plates Nos 57, 64.
- 74 Cascudo, L.da Câmara, *Folclore do Brasil (Pesquisas e Notas)* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundo de Cultura, 1967), pp. 182–7.
- 75 Luís Rodolfo Vilhena, *Projeto e missão. O movimento folclórico brasileiro, 1947–1964* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 1997), p. 77.
- 76 R.F.Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit. African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), pp. xiv, 101–60.
- 77 G.Kubik, *Angolan Traits in Black Music, Games and Dances of Brazil. A Study of African Cultural Extension Overseas* (Lisbon: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1979), p. 7.
- 78 J.C.de Souza Tavares, 'Dança da Guerra: Arquivo-Arma' (MA thesis, Sociology, Brasília: UnB, 1984), Summary.
- 79 Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho (GCAP), '*10 anos gingando na mesma luta*' (Salvador: GCAP, 1993), p. 5.
- 80 C.Daniel Dawson, *Dancing Between Two Worlds: Kongo-Angola Culture in the Americas* (New York: The Caribbean Cultural Center, 1991), Introduction.
- 81 See, for instance, K.Mann and E.G.Bay (eds) *Rethinking the African Diaspora. The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil* (London: Frank Cass, 2001) and L.M.Heywood, *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 82 Stephen Howe, *Afrocentrism. Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 1.
- 83 T.J.Desch-Obi, 'Engolo: Combat Traditions in African and African Diaspora History' (PhD thesis, Los Angeles, 2000. For a more detailed discussion of his contribution, see [Chapter 2](#)).
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- 85 Fernando Ortiz, *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folclore de Cuba* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1993), pp. 298, 300–2; *Glosario de Afronegrismos* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1991); pp. 207–9; *Ethnographic Atlas of Cuba. Traditional Popular Culture* (La Habana: Centro de Investigacion y Desarrollo de la Cultura Cubana 'Juan Marinello', n.d.).
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- 87 Desch-Obi, 'Engolo', pp. 212, 215, 258, 261.
- 88 Howe, *Afrocentrism*, pp. 2, 231.
- 89 K Dossar, 'Dancing between Two Worlds: An Aesthetic Analysis of Capoeira Angola' (PhD thesis, Temple University, 1994), pp. 125–6.
- 90 Howe, *Afrocentrism*, p. 2.
- 91 See L.Young, 'Hybridity's discontents: rereading science and "race"', in A.Brah and A.Coombies, *Hybridity and its Discontents. Politics, Science, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 154–70.
- 92 'Traveling Cultures', in L.Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 101.
- 93 S.Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in J.Rutherford, *Identity. Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 226, 235. Another approach to hybridity, yet of less relevance to diasporic phenomena in historical contexts, is Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). For a Latin American perspective of hybridity, see Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas: estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico: Grijalbo, 1989). A theory of *mestizaje* (miscegenation) that has common points with that of hybridity in the sense I invoke here is Jesús Martín-Barbero's *De los medios a las mediaciones. Comunicación, cultura y hegemonia* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1987).
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- 95 Dantas, *Vovô nagô*, p. 155.
- 96 The most detailed argument defending the importance of the Cariocan input for contemporary capoeira is made by A.L.L.Lopes, *A Capoeiragem no Rio de Janeiro. Primeiro ensaio: Sinhozinho e Rudolf Hermann* (Rio de Janeiro, author's edition, 2002).
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- 98 For summary of the debates between 'Tupi' and 'Lusocentrics', see W.Rego, *Capoeira Angola. Ensaio Sócio-Etnográfico* (Salvador: Itapuã, 1968), pp. 17–29; for the African origin see G.Kubik, *Angolan Traits*, p. 29 and Nei Lopes, *Dicionário Banto do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Prefeitura, c.1996), p. 75.
- 99 A.M.Smith, 'Rastafari as Resistance and the Ambiguities of Essentialism in the "New Social Movements"', E.Laclau (ed.), *The Making of Political Identities* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 171–204.
- 100 R.Samuel & P.Thompson (eds.), 'Introduction', *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 5.
- 101 For a discussion of these concepts see Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 4–5.
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- 103 There are a number of 'virtual rodas', see for instance the sites maintained by the Brazilian Capoeira Confederation (CBC) or M.Jeronimo (Sydney, Australia).

## 2

### Capoeira in the context of the Black Atlantic

- 1 The family structure (as part of culture in the widest sense) constituted their chief bone of contention. See E.Franklin Frazier, 'The Negro Family in Bahia, Brazil', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 7 (1942), pp. 465–78; and M.J.Herskovits, 'The Negro in Bahia, Brazil: A Problem in Method', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 8 (1943), pp. 394–402.
- 2 For a summary of the debate see S.W.Mintz and R.Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture. An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), pp. 11–12.
- 3 Mintz and Price, *The Birth*, p. 18.
- 4 Mintz and Price, *The Birth*, pp. 64, 83.



- 5 P.E.Lovejoy, 'Identifying Enslaved Africans in the African Diaspora', in P.E.Lovejoy (ed.), *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery* (London: Continuum, 2000), p. 24.
- 6 See, among others, M.A.Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); D.B.Chambers, "'My own nation": Igbo Exiles in the Diaspora', *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1997), 72–97.
- 7 I.Berlin, 'From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North-America', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. LIII, No. 2 (April 1996), pp. 251–88.
- 8 See also the recent assessments by R.Price, 'The Miracle of Creolization: A Retrospective', *New West Indian Guide*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (2001), pp. 35–64; and M.-R. Trouillot, 'Culture on the Edges: Creolization in the Plantation Context', *Plantation Society in the Americas*, Vol. V, No. 1 (1998), pp. 8–28.
- 9 More recently M.Warner-Lewis has suggested that creole derived from the Kikongo term *kuulolo*, 'excluded'. See Lovejoy, 'Identifying', pp. 13–14.
- 10 J.H.Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1974), p. 241.
- 11 J.N.Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).
- 12 E.C.Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment. A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); M.Banton, *Racial Theories* (2nd edn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 13 K.A.Appiah, *In My Father's House. Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Methuen), Chapters 1 and 2; S.Howe, *Afrocentrism. Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes* (London: Verso, 1998).
- 14 In Brazil this position has been prominently defended by Darcy Ribeiro, *O povo brasileiro. A formação e o sentido do Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995), p. 115.
- 15 Mintz and Price, *The Birth*, p. 9.
- 16 J.Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 186–91.
- 17 S.E.Greene for example showed that Yoruba did not serve as a lingua franca among the Ewe and therefore cannot be used as an indicator of cultural homogeneity. See 'Cultural Zones in the Era of the Slave Trade: Exploring the Yoruba Connection with the Anlo-Ewe', in P.E.Lovejoy, *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery* (London: Continuum, 2000), p. 98.
- 18 Thornton, *Africa*, p. 191.
- 19 R.S.Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba* (London: James Currey, 1988).
- 20 Beatrix Heintze, *Studien zur Geschichte Angolas im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Ein Lesebuch* (Koln: Rüdiger Köppe, 1996).
- 21 J.K.Thornton, 'Religious and Ceremonial Life in the Kongo and Mbundu Areas, 1500–1700', in L. M.Heywood (ed.), *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 74.
- 22 Furthermore, the definition of what was the Guinea Coast varied over the centuries. If in early Portuguese documents the term stands for the whole coastline south of Morocco, it became a more specific geographic designation once other major areas of the slave trade such as the 'Gold Coast' or the 'Slave Coast' had been carved out.
- 23 For that reason many scholars spell the historic kingdom with a k in order to avoid confusion.
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- 28 For an overview of contemporary candomblé, see R.Prandi, 'African Gods in Contemporary Brazil: A Sociological Introduction to Candomblé Today', *Ibero-Amerikanisches Archiv*, 3–4 (1998), pp. 326–52.
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- 30 R.Bastide, *Les Amériques Noires. Les Civilisations Africaines dans le Nouveau Monde* (Paris: Payot, 1967), p. 157; *The African Religions of Brazil* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 277; R.E.Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder. Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), p. 39.
- 31 See J.Braga, *Na gamela do feitiço: repressão e resistência nos candomblés da Bahia* (Salvador: EDUFBA, 1995), p. 56.
- 32 B.G.Dantas, *Vovó Nagô e Papai Branco. Usos e abusos da África no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1988).
- 33 K.D.Butler, *Freedom Given, Freedoms Won. Afro-Brazilians in Post-Abolition São Paulo and Salvador* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), pp. 156–9; for Cachoeira, see F.Wimberley, 'The Expansion of Afro-Bahian Religious Practices in Nineteenth Century Cachoeira', in H.Kraay (ed.), *Afro-Bahian Culture and Politics. Bahia, 1790s to 1990s* (Armonk, NY: M.E.Sharpe, 1998), pp. 74–89.
- 34 For a discussion of the different processes summarized under the broad label of syncretism, see S.F. Ferretti, *Repensando o sincretismo* (São Paulo: EDUSP, 1995).
- 35 C.R.Boxer, *Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire, 1415–1825* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), p. 19.
- 36 J.K.Thornton, 'Religious and Ceremonial Life', p. 87.
- 37 L.M.Heywood, 'Portuguese into African: The Eighteenth-Century Central African Background to Atlantic Creole Cultures', in Heywood, *Central Africans*, p. 113.
- 38 L.da Câmara Cascudo, *Dicionário do Folclore Brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Ediouro, 1972), p. 150.
- 39 J.B.von Spix and C.F.P.von Martius, *Viagem pelo Brasil: 1817–1820* (Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia, 1981), Vol. I, p. 180.
- 40 Some authors suggest that *batuques* could include religious ceremonies with drums. Tinhorão derives *lundu* from *calundu*, a colonial term for Afro-Brazilian religion. See J.R.Tinhorão, *História social da música popular brasileira* (Lisbon: Editorial Caminho, 1990), p. 80.
- 41 This is the expression used by the 'First Constitutions' of the archdiocese of Bahia in 1707. See Mariza de Carvalho Soares, *Devotos da cor. Identidade étnica, religiosidade e escravidão no Rio de Janeiro, século XVIII* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2000), p. 156.
- 42 M.Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 242.
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- 49 G.Kubik, 'Afrikanische Musiktraditionen in Brasilien', in T.de Oliveira Pinto (ed.), *Brasilien. Einführung in die Musiktraditionen Brasiliens* (Mainz: Schott, 1986), pp. 124–7.

- 50 G.Kubik has managed to link one contemporary form of *batuque* to rhythmic patterns of the Zambeze Valley. See 'Afrikanische Musikkulturen', pp. 138–40.
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- 52 J.R.Tinhorão, *Pequena história da música popular. Da modinha a lambada* (São Paulo: Art Editora, 1991), pp. 47–57.
- 53 J.R.Tinhorão, *História social*, pp. 84–9.
- 54 Marta Abreu, *O Império do Divino. Festas religiosas e cultura popular no Rio de Janeiro, 1830–1900* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1999), pp. 56, 83.
- 55 Tiago de Oliveira Pinto, *Capoeira, Samba, Candoblé. Afro-Brasilianische Musik im Recôncavo, Bahia* (Berlin: Museum für Völkerkunde, 1991), p. 110.
- 56 The term *samba* is clearly of Kongo/Angolan origin—even though scholars do not agree on the exact etymology. See wa Mukuna, *Contribuição Bantu*, pp. 91–2. The song 'Pelo telefone' (1917) marks the foundational moment for its contemporary Brazilian meaning.
- 57 To avoid confusing the reader I have omitted the discussion of other related forms, such as the *jongo* or the *fafa*. For more details see Tinhorão, *História social*. For the relation between *batuque* and different types of *samba* see also E.Carneiro, *Folgedos tradicionais* (Rio de Janeiro: FUNARTE/INF, 1982). pp. 27–54.
- 58 Karasch, *Slave Life*, pp. 282–4.
- 59 A.J.R.Russell-Wood, 'Black and Mulatto Brotherhoods in Colonial Brazil: A Study in Collective Behavior', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (1974), p. 576.
- 60 Kubik, 'Afrikanische Musiktraditionen', p. 134.
- 61 F.Ortiz, *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1993), p. 291.
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- 63 M.de Mello e Souza, *Reis negros no Brasil escravista. História da Festa de Coração de Rei Congo* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2002), p. 329.
- 64 E.W.Kiddy, 'Who is the King of Congo? A New Look at African and Afro-Brazilian Kings in Brazil', in Heywood, *Central Africans*, p. 182; Berlin, *From Creole to African*, p. 275.
- 65 The full account of this fascinating episode is told by Soares, *Devotos da cor*.
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- 67 J.Fagundes Hauck *et al.*, *História da Igreja no Brasil* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1979), Vol. I, pp. 247–9.
- 68 For the festival of the Divine Spirit in Rio, see the groundbreaking work of M.Abreu, *O Império do Divino. Festas religiosas e cultura popular no Rio de Janeiro, 1830–1900* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1999). For a brief English introduction to the festival of Bomfim in Bahia, see L.M.Silverstein, 'The Celebration of Our Lord of the Good End: Changing State, Church and Afro-Brazilian Relations in Bahia', in D.J.Hess and R.A.DaMatta, *The Brazilian Puzzle. Culture on the Borderlands of the Western World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 134–54.
- 69 M.Abreu, *O Império do Divino*, p. 92.
- 70 See for example E.Carneiro, *O quilombo dos Palmares* (São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1988), pp. 64, 116.
- 71 J.K.Thornton, 'The Art of War in Angola, 1575–1680', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30 (1988), pp. 360–78.
- 72 For a brief synthesis, see W.J.Baker, 'Traditional Sports, Africa', in D.Levinson and K.Christensen (eds), *Encyclopaedia of World Sport. From Ancient Times to the Present* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1996), pp. 1062–7.

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- 79 P.E.H.Hair (ed.), *An interim and makeshift edition of André Álvares de Almada's Brief Treatise of the Rivers of Guinea, being an English translation of a variorum text of Tratado breve dos Rios de Guiné (c.1594) organised by the late Avelino Teixeira da Mota* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 1984) Vol. 1, p. 16. I am very grateful to Dr José Horta (Universidade de Lisboa) for providing me with this precious reference from his own research.
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- 88 J.A.Cavazzi de Montecúccolo, *Descrição histórica dos três reinos Congo, Matamba e Angola* (Lisbon: Junta de Investigações do Ultramar, 1965), Vol. 1, p. 151.
- 89 [A.] Neves e Souza, ...*Da minha África e do Brasil que eu vi...* (Luanda: n.p., n.d.), p. 57.
- 90 L.da Câmara Cascudo, *Folklore do Brasil (Pesquisas e Notas)* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundo de Cultura, 1967), pp. 182–7. To my knowledge a full version of Neves e Sousa's letter(s) has never been published. Extracts from Cascudo are however frequently cited and reproduced. The first extensive quote can be found in V.de Oliveira, *Capoeira, Frevo, Passo* (Recife: Companhia Editora de Pernambuco, 1971), pp. 68–9. I suspect many capoeiristas use only this quote of a quote of a quote in their discussions about capoeira's origins.
- 91 Cascudo, *Folklore*, pp. 182, 184.
- 92 Cascudo, *Folklore*, p. 186.
- 93 Desch-Obi, 'Engolo'.
- 94 J.C.Miller, 'Central Africa during the Era of the Slave Trade', in Heywood, *Central Africans*, pp. 46, 82.
- 95 I.de Castro Henriques, *Commerce et changement en Angola au XIX siècle. Imbangala et Tshokwe face à la modernité* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), Vol. 1, p. 182.
- 96 Desch-Obi, 'Engolo', pp. 29–30.
- 97 C.Estermann, *Etnografia do Sudoeste de Angola* (Lisbon: Junta de Investigações do Ultramar, 1956–7), Vol. 2, p. 31.
- 98 C.Estermann, *Etnografia*. An English translation is also available: *The Ethnography of Southwestern Angola* (New York: Africana, 1979).
- 99 Desch-Obi, 'Engolo', p. 53.
- 100 Desch-Obi, 'Engolo', p. 54.

- 101 E.M.Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (Bloomington: 1962), pp. 81–2, 245–9; Desch-Obi, ‘Engolo’, p. 53.
- 102 Desch-Obi, ‘Engolo’, p. 56.
- 103 Desch-Obi, ‘Engolo’, pp. 12, 76.
- 104 Desch-Obi, ‘Engolo’, p. 61.
- 105 Estermann, *Etnografia*, pp. 69–92 and Fig. 98; ‘A festa da puberdade em algumas tribos de Angola meridional’, in C.Estermann, *Etnografia de Angola (Sudoeste e Centro)*. *Colectanea de artigos dispersos* (Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, 1983), p. 204.
- 106 W.D.Hambly, ‘The Ovimbundu of Angola’, *Anthropological Series* (Chicago, IL: Field Museum of Natural History, 1934), Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 220.
- 107 J.M.Vaz, *No mundo dos Cabindas. Estudo etnográfico* (Lisbon: L.I.A.M., 1970), Vol. 1, p. 214.
- 108 J.H.Weeks, ‘Anthropological Notes on the Bangala of the Upper Congo River’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 40 (1910), p. 412.
- 109 See also S.Paul, ‘The Wrestling Tradition’, p. 32.
- 110 Augusto Bastos, ‘Traços gerais sobre a etnografia do distrito de Benguela’, *Boletim da Sociedade Geográfica de Lisboa*, 26a Série (1908), p. 198. I am grateful to Rosa Cruz e Silva from the National Archives in Luanda for providing me with this precious reference.
- 111 A.Ramos, *O folclore negro no Brasil. Demopsicologia e psicanálise* (Rio de Janeiro: Casa do Estudante do Brasil, 1954), pp. 120–4.
- 112 On Henrique de Carvalho, see Castro Henriques, *Commerce*, Vol. 1, pp. 125–9.
- 113 H.A.Dias de Carvalho, *Etnografia e história tradicional dos povos de Lunda [...]* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1890), pp. 426–7; see also Ramos, *Folclore negro*, pp. 121–2.
- 114 Letter from 27 January 1936. See W.Freitas Oliveira and V.da Costa Lima, *Cartas de Édison Carneiro a Artur Ramos. De 4 de janeiro de 1936 a 6 de dezembro de 1938* (São Paulo: Corrupio, 1987), p. 89.
- 115 T.J.Desch-Obi, ‘Combat and the Crossing of the Kalunga’, in Heywood, *Central Africans*, pp. 354–7.
- 116 D.C.Dawson, ‘Capoeira, an Exercise of the Soul’, in R.Rosen and P.M.Sevastiades (eds), *Celebration: Visions and Voices of the African Diaspora* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 1994), p. 19; Desch-Obi, ‘Combat’, p. 369; and Desch-Obi, ‘Engolo’, p. 171.
- 117 E.L.Powe, *Combat Games of the African Indian Ocean (Madagascar, Reunion, Comores)* (Madison, WI: Dan Aiki Publications, 2001), pp. 25–59.
- 118 Powe, *Combat Games*, pp. 60–122, 129.
- 119 S.Fuma and J.R.Dreinaza, *Le moringart guerrier* (La Réunion: Océan Editions, 1992); Powe, *Combat Games*, pp. 123–50.
- 120 Câmara Cascudo, *Dicionário*, pp. 186–7.
- 121 The following summary of bassula is based on the article S.Neto: ‘Uma “bassula” à pescador/Bassula—Full-contact sport, fisherman style’, *Austral, Revista de bordo TAAG*, 33 (2000) pp. 39–45. Neto gathered most of his information from Mestre Kabetula, a fisherman born in 1920. I am grateful to Mariano Almeida (Fumaça) for providing me with this reference.
- 122 The important difference is that traditional political structures in Africa did not entirely disappear with colonialism, especially in areas of ‘indirect’ colonial rule.
- 123 For the Brazilians in Benguela see the work by José Curto (University of York, Canada), presented at the Workshop ‘Angola on the Move’, Berlin, September 2003.
- 124 The important difference is that traditional political structures in Africa did not entirely disappear with colonialism, especially in areas of ‘indirect’ colonial rule.
- 125 Morgan, ‘The Cultural Implications’, p. 125.
- 126 Quoted in A.Peltreuve-Villeneuve, ‘The AfroAmerican Dance-Fights as a Form of Resistance against Oppression’ (Mémoire de D.E.A, Université Paris VII, 1993), pp. 8–9.
- 127 D.Abrahams and J.F.Szwed (eds), *After Africa. Extracts from British Travel Accounts and Journals of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries concerning the Slaves, their Manners, and Customs in the British West Indies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 282.

- 128 R. and S.Price (eds), *Stedman's Surinam. Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 277.
- 129 Desch-Obi, 'Engolo', pp. 146–8; E.D.Genovese, *Roll, Jordan Roll. The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), p. 569.
- 130 M.L.E.Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique e historique de la partie française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue* (Paris: Société de l'Histoire des Colonies Françaises, 1958), Vol. I, pp. 70–1 [1st edn, 1797].
- 131 Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description*, Vol. I, p. 71.
- 132 Idem.
- 133 On the Venezuelan *garrote*, see E.Sanoja, *Juego de Garrote Larense. El método venezolano de defensa personal* (Caracas: Federación Nacional de la Cultura Popular, 1984); M.Röhrig Assunção, 'Juegos de Palo en Lara. Elementos para la historia social de un arte marcial venezolano', *Revista de Índias*, Vol. LIX, No. 215 (1999), pp. 55–89.
- 134 P.Mason, *Bacchanal! The Carnival Culture of Trinidad* (London: Latin American Bureau, 1998), p. 148.
- 135 P.van Koningsbruggen, *Trinidad Carnival. A Quest for National Identity* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 17.
- 136 B.Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, 1870–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 168.
- 137 P.Mason, *Bacchanal!*, pp. 148–50.
- 138 The following summary is entirely based on Fernando Ortiz, *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1993), pp. 298–329. All subsequent quotes on *maní* are taken from his description.
- 139 Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Miscelánea de Expedientes, Legajo 570, Expediente S, Contra 17 esclavos de Don José Maria Peñalver. I am grateful to Manuel Barcía Paz (La Habana/Essex) for providing me with this valuable reference.
- 140 'A Negro's Fight', *Harper's Weekly*, 15 August 1874. I am grateful to Frede Abreu for providing me with this reference.
- 141 J.M.Rugendas, *Voyage pittoresque dans le Brésil* (Paris, 1835), p. 26.
- 142 Desch-Obi, 'Engolo', pp. 137–87.
- 143 J.Gerstin and Dominique Cyrille, 'Martinique: Cane Fields and City Streets', CD *Caribbean Voyage. The Alan Lomax Collection. The 1962 Field Recordings* (Cambridge, MA: Rounder Records, 2001), comment to tracks 5 and 6.
- 144 Desch-Obi, 'Engolo', p. 195.
- 145 K.Dunn (Katherine Dunham). 'L'Ag'ya of Martinique'. *Esquire*, Vol. 12, No. 5 (1939), pp. 84–5, 126.
- 146 Dunn, 'L'Ag'ya', p. 126.
- 147 J.Michalon, *Le ladjia. Origine et pratiques* (Paris: Éditions Caribéennes, 1987), pp. 66–7.
- 148 R.F. Thompson, 'Black Martial Arts of the Caribbean', *Latin American Literature and Arts*, 37 (1987), p. 47.
- 149 Michelon, *Le ladjia*, p. 60.
- 150 Desch-Obi, 'Combat', p. 363 and Desch-Obi, 'Engolo', p. 203.
- 151 J.L.Lewis, *Ring of Liberation. Deceptive Discourse in Brazilian Capoeira* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 208, 219.
- 152 Muniz Sodré has already suggested a parallel between capoeira styles and soft and hard forms in other martial arts. See *A verdade seduzida. Por um conceito de cultura no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: CODECRI, 1983), pp. 203–11.
- 153 Rugendas, *Voyage*, p. 26.
- 154 E.Carneiro, *Negros bantus. Notas de ethnographia religiosa e de folk-lore* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1937), p. 165.
- 155 For the use of *candomblé* chants in capoeira, see Carneiro, *Negros bantus*, pp. 153–6. For the use of capoeira songs in *samba*, see CD A.Simon (ed.), *Capoeira, Samba, Candomblé-Bahia, Brazil* (Berlin: Preußischer

- Kulturbesitz, 1990), track 8. For the importance of *samba-de-roda* in capoeira, see CD *Academia de Capoeira de Angola São Jorge dos Irmãos Unidos do Mestre Caiçara* (Manaus: EMI, 1998).
- 156 Mukuna, *Contribuição Bantu*, p. 203.

## 3

**Capoeiragem in Rio de Janeiro, c. 1800–1930**

- 1 M.Florentino and J.R.Góes, *A paz das senzalas. Famílias escravas e tráfico atlântico, Rio de Janeiro, c.1790–c. 1850* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1997), pp. 45–6.
- 2 A Carioca is an inhabitant of the city of Rio de Janeiro.
- 3 J.Malerba, *A Corte no exílio. Civilização e poder no Brasil às vésperas da Independência, 1808–1821* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000), p. 299.
- 4 For more details on the population of Rio, see M.Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro, 1800–1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 60–5.
- 5 For more details see Karasch, *Slave Life*, pp. 185–213, still the best overview of urban slavery in Rio.
- 6 For *música de barbeiros*, see J.Ramos Tinhorão, *História social da música popular brasileira* (Lisbon: Ed. Caminho, 1990), pp. 121–38.
- 7 Karasch, *Slave Life*, p. 152.
- 8 C.E.L.Soares, *A capoeira escrava e outras tradições rebeldes no Rio de Janeiro (1808–1850)* (Campinas: UNICAMP, 2001), p. 441.
- 9 The document was found by Nireu Cavalcanti, who wrote a PhD on the history of Rio de Janeiro, 1710–1810. See A.Gonçalves, ‘Capoeiragem: rebeldia e habilidade negra no Rio’, *Jornal da Tarde*, 6.10.2001.
- 10 Since this kind of semantic shift also reflects important changes of the practice, I will use italics when employing *capoeira* in that nineteenth-century meaning.
- 11 T.H.Holloway, *Policing Rio de Janeiro. Repression and Resistance in a Nineteenth Century City* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 9.
- 12 Quoted in and translated by Holloway, *Polidng Rio*, p. 32
- 13 Quoted in Malerba, *A Corte*, p. 136.
- 14 Edital from 6.12.1817, quoted in Soares, *A capoeira escrava*, p. 557.
- 15 Quoted in A.Morales de los Rios Filho, *O Rio de Janeiro Imperial* (Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks, 2000), p. 83. The *quati* is a rat-like Brazilian rodent.
- 16 L.M.Algranti, *O feitor ausente. Estudo sobre a escravidão urbana no Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1822* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1988), pp. 209.
- 17 Soares, *A capoeira escrava*, pp. 125, 126.
- 18 Soares, *A capoeira escrava*, table p. 599. I am using the classification developed by Karasch, *Slave Life* p. 13.
- 19 Karasch, *Slave Life*, p. 25.
- 20 Soares, *A capoeira escrava*, pp. 131, 134, 144
- 21 Soares, *A capoeira escrava*, p. 125
- 22 See, among others, P.Coêlho de Araújo, *Abordagens sócio-antropológicas da luta/jogo da capoeira. De uma actividade guerreira para uma actividade lúdica* (Maia: Instituto Superior da Maia, 1997).
- 23 T.Holloway, ‘“A Healthy Terror”: Police Repression of *Capoeiras* in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro’, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (1989), p. 649.
- 24 M.L.Bretas, ‘A queda do império da navalha e da rasteira (A República e os capoeiras)’, *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos*, No. 20 (1991), p. 240.
- 25 Soares, *Capoeira escrava*, p. 116, M.T.Chvaicer, ‘The Criminalization of Capoeira in Nineteenth-Century Brazil’, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (2002), p. 538.
- 26 J.M.Rugendas, *Voyage Pittoresque dans le Brésil* (Paris: Engelmann & Compagnie, 1835), p. 26.
- 27 P.Diener and M de F.Costa, *Juan Mauricio Rugendas. Pintor y Dibujante* (São Paulo: Estção Liberdade, Goethe-Institut, 1998), p. 66.



- 28 A.P.D.G., *Sketches of Portuguese Life, Manners, Costume, and Character* (London, 1826), pp. 304–6, quoted by Holloway, 'A Healthy Terror', p. 646.
- 29 F.J.Denis, *Histoire et description du Brésil* (Paris: F.Didot frères, 1839), p. 147; see original French extract at <http://home.worldnet.fr/~polbrian/Ribeyrol.html> [accessed 08.01.2002]; see also M.Abreu, *O Império do Divino* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1999), p. 91.
- 30 Soares, *A capoeira escrava*, pp. 88, 94, 111. This author suggests that the jack knife was a status symbol slaves wanted to possess. According to Holloway, 'Healthy Terror', p. 647, the *sovelão*, 'a type of dagger shaped like a large awl', 'was a favorite weapon of *capoeiras* in this period'.
- 31 Soares, *A capoeira escrava*, p. 180.
- 32 Soares, *A capoeira escrava*, pp. 109–10 and C.E.L.Soaes, *Zungú: rumor de muitas vozes* (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Publico do Estado, 1998).
- 33 Adolfo Morales de los Rios was one of the most prominent advocates of this thesis. See *O Rio de Janeiro*, p. 72.
- 34 Soares, *A capoeira escrava*, pp. 177–8.
- 35 See the sample of 20 *capoeiras* in Soares, *A capoeira escrava*, p. 91.
- 36 Another evidence for the existence of gangs is the police report about a free creole, described as a 'chief of *capoeiras*' and accused of being a 'seducer' of slaves. See Soares, *Capoeira escrava*, p. 83.
- 37 For instance Araújo, *Abordagens*, p. 164.
- 38 Holloway, 'A Healthy Terror', pp. 647–8; Soares, *A capoeira escrava*, pp. 323–36.
- 39 Holloway, 'A Healthy Terror', p. 651; Soares, *A capoeira escrava*, p. 190.
- 40 Soares, *A capoeira escrava*, p. 122.
- 41 Holloway, *Policing*, p. 211 and 'A Healthy Terror', p. 656. Numbers for 1865 are, however, much lower.
- 42 Soares, *Capoeira escrava*, pp. 79, 87, 187, 249.
- 43 Holloway, 'A Healthy Terror', p. 649. Feijó also limited punishments administered on behalf of slave owners to 50 lashes and extinguished the chain gangs (*libambos*). Idem, and Soares, *Capoeira escrava*, pp. 106, 108.
- 44 Holloway, 'A Healthy Terror', pp. 652–3.
- 45 For more details on Rio's jails, see Holloway, *Policing*, pp. 54–7, Karasch, *Slave Life*, pp. 118–26 and Soares, *Capoeira escrava*.
- 46 Soares, *Capoeira escrava*, pp. 261, 285.
- 47 Soares, *Capoeira escrava*, p. 86.
- 48 C.Ribeyrolles, *Brasil pitoresco. História-descrições-viagens-instituições-colonização* (Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia, 1980). For the English translation I used the original French version available at: <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/polbrian/Ribeyrol.html>
- 49 Araújo, *Abordagens*, pp. 148–50.
- 50 This affirmation is based on interviews with M.João Pequeno, João Grande, and Boca Rica who all describe the existence of some basic capoeira movements in their regions of origin.
- 51 C.Expilly, *Le Brésil tel qu'il est* (Paris, 1962), as reproduced at <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/polbrian/expilly.htm>
- 52 Soares, *Capoeira*, pp. 83, 191–2.
- 53 A.J.de Mello Moraes Filho, *Festas e tradições populares do Brasil* (Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia, EDUSP, 1979), p. 260. A similar description is provided by de los Rios, *Rio de Janeiro*, p. 73.
- 54 Chvaicer, 'The Criminalization', pp. 525, 541.
- 55 The only evidence given in support of her claim seems to be a quote she misinterpreted: the *capoeiras* were attracted to the masses, 'just as a moth is attracted to light', not the other way round. See Chvaicer, 'The Criminalization', p. 539 and C.E.L.Soaes, *A negregada instituição. Os capoeiras no Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Prefeitura da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, 1994), p. 74.
- 56 Machado de Assis, *Crônicas, 1859–1888* (Porto Alegre: Jackson, 1944), Vol. 4, p. 228.
- 57 Soares, *A capoeira*, p. 85.
- 58 L.S.Dias, *Quem tem medo da capoeira? Rio de Janeiro, 1890–1904* (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, 2001), p. 118.
- 59 Holloway, 'A Healthy Terror', p. 660.

- 60 Soares, *A negregada*, p. 117.
- 61 Soares, *A negregada*, pp. 117 and Mello Moraes, *Festas*, p. 259.
- 62 J.E.Hahner, *Poverty and Politics. The Urban Poor in Brazil, 1870–1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), p. 47.
- 63 For the animosity between Portuguese and Brazilian workers see S.Chalhoub, *Trabalho, Lar e Botequim* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1986); Hahner, *Poverty and Politics*, pp. 139–55.
- 64 Soares, *A negregada*, p. 108.
- 65 Bretas, 'A queda', pp. 241–2. The sample is of, respectively, 105 and 110 arrests for these two years.
- 66 Soares, *A negregada*, p. 76.
- 67 J.M.Macedo, *Memórias da Rua do Ouvidor* (Brasília: UnB, 1988), pp. 37–40. This is often seen by contemporary capoeiristas as evidence for the eighteenth-century practice of capoeira. It is important to acknowledge, however, that the *Memórias* is a nineteenth-century novel that draws on the author's knowledge of capoeira at that time and projects it onto the colonial past.
- 68 On Vidigal, see Holloway, *Policing*, pp. 35–8 and Soares, *Capoeira escrava*, pp. 443–4 as well as the classical novel by M.A.de Almeida, *Memórias de um sargento de milícias* (Rio de Janeiro: Ediouro, n.d.).
- 69 J.Moura, 'Subsídios para uma visão retrospectiva da capoeiragem no Rio de Janeiro', *Revista Capoeira*, Vol. II, No. 6, pp. 44–5; J.Moura, 'Um titã da capoeiragem: Plácido de Abreu', *Revista Capoeira*, Vol. II, No. 12, pp. 46–7.
- 70 Soares, *A negregada*, pp. 173–5, 300.
- 71 N.C.Russo, *O Jogo do Pau* (Lisbon: author's edition, n.d.).
- 72 A.Azevedo, *O Cortiço* (Rio de Janeiro: Briguier, 1943), pp. 155–60.
- 73 L.da Câmara Cascudo, *Folclore do Brasil. Pesquisas e notas* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundo de Cultura, 1967), p. 187. See also T.J.Desch-Obi, 'Engolo: combat Traditions in African and African Diaspora History' (PhD, University of California, Los Angeles, 2000), p. 243.
- 74 Mello Moraes Filho, *Festas*, p. 258, see also de los Rios, *Rio de Janeiro*, p. 73.
- 75 Bretas, 'A queda do império', pp. 241–2; Soares, 'A negregada', p. 156.
- 76 Desch-Obi, 'Engolo', p. 273.
- 77 Soares, *A capoeira escrava*, pp. 121, 89, 182. It has to be said however that he reckons the fragility of his evidence on this topic.
- 78 Mello Moraes Filho, *Festas*, p. 258; P.de Abreu, *Os capoeiras* (Rio de Janeiro: J.Alves, 1886), pp. 3–4.
- 79 For more details see Holloway, *Policing*, pp. 223–34.
- 80 Due to the problematic character of the sources, there is still no definitive figure for the total number of recruits. I have adopted here the numbers calculated by J.P.de Sousa, *Escravidão ou morte. Os escravos brasileiros na Guerra do Paraguai* (Rio de Janeiro: Mauad/ADESA, 1996), p. 89.
- 81 Sousa, *Escravidão ou morte*, p. 95.
- 82 Desch-Obi, 'Engolo', pp. 240, 245.
- 83 Sousa, *Escravidão ou morte*, p. 95.
- 84 Dias, *Quem tem medo*, pp. 17, 90.
- 85 Soares, *A negregada instituição*, p. 50.
- 86 Soares, *A negregada instituição*, pp. 54, 95.
- 87 In his latest work, Soares corrects his earlier view on the point and suggest that the Nagoa are rather linked to a Nagô or Mina tradition, but offers little evidence beyond the obvious phonetic similarity between Nagô and Nagoa. See *A capoeira escrava*, p. 390.
- 88 Soares, *A negregada instituição*, pp. 54, 126–7.
- 89 Holloway, *Policing*, p. 223.
- 90 Abreu, *Os capoeiras*. I am translating here from the text as reproduced by Jair Moura in *Negaça*, Vol. III, No. 3 (1995), pp. 7–11.
- 91 Mello Moraes Filho, *Festas*, p. 258; Dias, *Quem tem medo*, pp. 103–5. According to the Aurélio Dictionary, *Caxingulé* designates a rodent; the term is derived from Kimbundo and means 'palm tree rat'.
- 92 Abreu, *Os capoeiras*, p. 8.

- 93 Abreu, *Os capoeiras*, p. 8.
- 94 Abreu, *O Império do Divino*, pp. 53, 102.
- 95 Abreu, *Os capoeiras*, p. 9.
- 96 Mello Moraes Filho, *Festas*, pp. 262–3.
- 97 Mello Moraes Filho rather suggests the opposite, namely that ‘he did not receive influence from the local *capoeiragem* nor from other parishes, making a life of his own, and being a *capoeira* on his own risk and account’, idem, p. 263. See also N.Capoeira, ‘Manduca da Praia, violencia, poder, dinheiro e valentia’, *Revista Capoeira*, Vol. I, No. 3, p. 50.
- 98 Soares, *A negregada instituição*, p. 176–7.
- 99 Mello Moraes, idem. Later Manduca went to Lisbon and had another battle with Sant’ana. See Bretas, ‘A queda do império’, p. 245.
- 100 Until 1881 Brazilian MPs were elected in two turns: first voters elected a selected number of ‘eleitores’, which then proceeded to elect the MPs.
- 101 My account summarizes the research by Soares, *A negregada instituição*, pp. 197–202.
- 102 Soares, *A negregada instituição*, pp. 217–221.
- 103 On the Black Guard, see M.R.Trochim, ‘The Brazilian Black Guard. Racial Conflict in Post-Abolition Brazil’, *The Americas*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (1988), pp. 285–300.
- 104 All figures from Bretas, ‘A queda do império’, pp. 249–52. See also Soares, *A negregada instituição*, pp. 290–301; A.L.C.S.Pires, ‘Escritos sobre a cultura afro-brasileira. A formação histórica da capoeira contemporânea, 1890–1950’ (PhD Thesis, Campinas: UNICAMP, 2001), p. 22ff.
- 105 This was not an absolute rule, some Republicans having established links with *capoeiras*. The most prominent case is that of Lopes Trovão who enjoyed protection by a *capoeira*, but was unable to save him from the Republican purge. See Dias, *Quem tem medo*, p. 130.
- 106 Decret 847, 11 October 1890, quoted in C.Barbieri, *Um jeito brasileiro de aprender a ser* (Brasília: DEFER, 1993), pp. 117–18.
- 107 These records do only include the suburbs of Rio; those of the central parishes were not available. A. L.C.Simões Pires, ‘A Capoeira no jogo das cores: criminalidade, cultura e racismo na cidade do Rio de Janeiro (1890–1937)’ (MA Thesis, Campinas, UNICAMP, 1996), pp. 102–4.
- 108 Dias, *Quem tem medo*, p. 146.
- 109 J.Moura, ‘Evolução, apogeu e declínio da capoeiragem no Rio de Janeiro’, *Cadernos Rioarte*, Vol. I, No. 3 (1985), p. 93 asserts that capoeira also survived in Catumbi, Rio Cumprido and São Cristovão.
- 110 J.Efegê, *Figuras e coisas do carnaval carioca* (Rio de Janeiro: FUNARTE, 1982), pp. 209–10.
- 111 C.Meireles, *Batuque, samba e macumba. Estudos de gesto e ritmo, 1926–1934* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 1983), p. 52. See further accounts in M.A.Borges Salvadori, ‘Capoeiras e malandros: pedaços de uma sonora tradição popular (1890–1950) (MA thesis, Campinas, UNICAMP, 1990).

#### 4

#### Workers, vagrants and tough guys in Bahia, c. 1860–1950

- 1 For more details on colonial sugar plantations, see S.B.Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society, Bahia, 1550–1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- 2 The best account of the Recôncavo agriculture during the early nineteenth century is provided by B. J.Barickman, *A Bahian Counterpoint. Sugar, Tobacco, Cassava, and Slavery in the Recôncavo, 1780– 1860* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- 3 F.Wimberley, ‘The Expansion of Afro-Bahian Religious Practices in Nineteenth Century Cachoeira’, in H.Kraay (ed.), *Afro-Brazilian Culture and Politics. Bahia, 1790s to 1990s* (Armonk: M.E.Sharpe, 1998), p. 86; K.Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in Post-Abolition São Paulo and Salvador* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), pp. 195–6.

- 4 J.J.Reis, *Rebelião escrava no Brasil: a historia do levante dos malês (1835)* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1986), p. 16.
- 5 The term Sudan is derived from an Arabic term for blackness. Arabic slave traders referred to the whole area south of the Sahara—from where black slaves came—as Sudan.
- 6 Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations*, p. 341.
- 7 For the *escravos de ganho* in Salvador, see Reis, João José, 'The Revolution of the "Ganhadores": Urban Labour, Ethnicity and the African Strike of 1857 in Bahia, Brazil.' *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 29 (1997), pp. 355–93.
- 8 They are reproduced in F.J.de Abreu, 'A capoeira baiana no século XIX', *IE, Capoeira!*, Vol. I, No. 7 (c.2000), p. 14.
- 9 J.Wetherell, Brazil. *Stray Notes from Bahia* (Liverpool: Webb & Hunt, 1860), pp. 119–20.
- 10 Idem, pp. 6, 106–7 for the *berimbau*.
- 11 The *Alabama*, 17 March, 9 April and 12 September 1867. Both articles are reproduced in F.Abreu, 'A capoeira baiana', p. 17.
- 12 *O Alabama*, 12.4.1870. I am very grateful to Hendrik Kraay for providing me with this and other precious references from this newspaper which complements the material found by F.Abreu.
- 13 M.Querino, *A Bahia de outrora* (Salvador: Livraria Progresso, 1955), p. 74.
- 14 The poem was first reproduced in J.Moura, *Mestre Bimba. Crônica da Capoeiragem* (Salvador: author's edition, 1991), pp. 14–15.
- 15 *O Alabama*, 17.3., 9.4. and 12.9.1867, as quoted by F.Abreu, 'A capoeira baiana,' p. 17.
- 16 Querino, *A Bahia*, p. 75.
- 17 *O Alabama*, 12.10.1866.
- 18 Figures from J.P.de Sousa, *Escravidão ou morte. Os escravos brasileiros na Guerra do Paraguai* (Rio de Janeiro: Mauad/ADESA, 1996), p. 89. M.Querino claims as many as 18,725 Bahians fought in Paraguay (*A Bahia*, p. 188). Oral tradition has it that slave *capoeiras* were already serving in a patriot battalion during the War of Independence, but no written evidence has yet been found to confirm it (see D. Coutinho, *O ABC da capoeira angola. Os manuscritos do Mestre Noronha*. Brasília: DEFER/GDF, 1993, p. 35).
- 19 Querino, *A Bahia*, pp. 78–80.
- 20 Querino, *A Bahia*, p. 244.
- 21 'Paranaê' probably refers to the Paraná river, which runs from Brazil into Paraguay and delimits part of the border between both countries.
- 22 This traditional *ladainha* has many different versions. The allusion to the Paraguay War is clearly made in the recording by M.Traira.
- 23 According to oral history, only at a later stage did festivities for Abolition in Santo Amaro also include a capoeira performance. For these celebrations, also listen to Caetano Veloso, CD *Noites do Norte* (São Paulo: Universal Music, c.2000), track 3: '13 de maio'.
- 24 P.Fry *et al.*, 'Negros e brancos no carnaval da Velha República', in J.J.Reis (ed.), *Escravidão e invenção da liberdade* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1988), p. 253; Butler, *Freedom Given*, pp. 175–87.
- 25 The best account of the repression against *candomblé* during the First Republic is provided by J. Braga, *Na gamela do feitiço. Repressão e resistência nos candomblés da Bahia* (Salvador: EDUFBA, 1995).
- 26 CD *A Poesia de Boca Rica. Berimbau solo Capoeira Angola* (Manaus: Sonopress, 2000), track 3.
- 27 Capoeira in late nineteenth-century Bahia possibly had further synonyms. João do Rio relates that Bahian migrants in Rio called it *cungú* or 'playing *mandinga*' (quoted in J.Moura, *Capoeira-Arte & Malandragem*, Salvador: Prefeitura Municipal, 1980, p. 22).
- 28 Antonio Viana, *Quintal de Nagô e outras crônicas* (Salvador: Centro de Estudos Baianos/UFBa, 1979), p. 8.
- 29 C.B.Ott, *Formação e evolução étnica da cidade do Salvador (o folclore Baiano)* (Salvador: Tipografia Maní Editora, 1955), pp. 153–5.
- 30 E.Carneiro, *Negros bantos. Notas de etnografia religiosa e de folk-lore* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1937), pp. 151–2.

- 31 Coutinho, *O ABC*, p. 25. For neighbourhood rivalry see also Almeida, *Capoeira, A Brazilian Art Form* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1986), p. 120.
- 32 W.Rego, *Capoeira Angola. Ensaio sócio-etnográfico* (Salvador: Itapuã, 1968), pp. 35–6; R.Almeida, ‘O brinquedo da capoeira’, *Revista do Arquivo Municipal*, Vol. 7, No. 84 (1942), pp. 155–62; L.R.iera, *O jogo de capoeira. Cultura popular no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Sprint, 1995), pp. 101–2.
- 33 For a more detailed description see Viana, *Quintal de Nagô*, pp. 23–7.
- 34 Tabaroa designates the large straw hat used by the market women, see footnote by F.Abreu in Coutinho, *O ABC*, p. 77.
- 35 Mestre Noronha acknowledges the change of the venue from the Feira do 7 market to the quay, due to the former being a ‘very dangerous’ area, e.g. prone to violence (Coutinho, *O ABC*, p. 19).
- 36 Coutinho, *O ABC*, pp. 20–1.
- 37 On gender roles in Afro-Bahian culture, compare T.de Oliveira Pinto, *Capoeira, Samba, Candomblé. Afro-Brasilianische Musik im Recôncavo, Bahia* (Berlin: Museum für Völkerkunde, 1991), pp. 34–6.
- 38 M.Bola Sete mentions five other women that ‘became famous in capoeira’: Júlia Fogareira, Maria Pernambucana, Maria Cachoeira, Maria Pé no Mato, OdíZlia. See *A Capoeira Angola na Bahia* (Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 1997), pp. 27–8.
- 39 *DiárioPopular*, 16.11.1969.
- 40 *Jornal do Brasil*, 5.3.1961.
- 41 This at least is the version told by M.Canjiquinha in A.Moreira (ed.), *Canjiquinha, alegria da capoeira* (Salvador: A Rasteira, 1989), p. 29. Canjiquinha also mentions Maria Avestruz and asserts that Palmeirão killed the famous troublemaker Pedro Porreta.
- 42 A.L.Cardoso Simões Pires, ‘Escritos sobre a cultura afro-brasileira. A formação histórica da capoeira contemporânea, 1890–1950 (PhD thesis, History, UNICAMP, 2001), p. 117. This author also mentions the *corrido* ‘Dona Maria do Camboatá’ as further evidence of women in capoeira. The verses that explicitly make her a capoeirista seem, however, to be of recent origin. The ‘traditional’ verses do not clearly assert that she practised the art.
- 43 Carneiro, *Negros bantos*, p. 148; Almeida, ‘O brinquedo da capoeira’.
- 44 There is ample evidence for the use of *balões* in early twentieth-century *vadição*. See Carneiro, *Negros bantos*, p. 10; A.Vianna, *Quintal de Nagô e outras crônicas* (Salvador: UFBa, 1979), p. 9; M. Pastinha, *Capoeira Angola* (Salvador: Fundação Cultural do Estado da Bahia, 1988), pp. 30, 69; *Manuscritos e desenhos de Mestre Pastinha* (edited by A.Decanio, Salvador, n.d.), p. 12a. See also F.J. de Abreu, ‘*Bimba e Bamba*’. *A capoeira no ringue* (Salvador: Instituto Jair Moura, 1999) p. 71, footnote 12 and the competent discussion in K.K.Bonates, *Iú na Mandingueira, a ave símbolo da capoeira* (Manaus: Fenix, 1999), p. 54. Evidence for the use of *balões* can also be found in the photos accompanying C. Tavares, ‘Capoeira mata um!’ (*O Cruzeiro*, 10.1.1948), pp. 6–14, and the movie *Vadição*. According to M.Sodré, *Mestre Bimba, corpo de mandinga* (Rio de Janeiro: Manati, 2002), p. 69, one type of *balão* was called *aloandê*.
- 45 For a relation of kicks and other movements used by different *mestres* in the 1960s, see Rego, *Capoeira Angola*, pp. 65–9. See also A.Vianna, *Casos e coisas da Bahia* (Salvador: Secretaria de Educação e Saúde, 1950), p. 153.
- 46 E.Carneiro, ‘Capoeira’, *Cadernos de Folclore*, No. 1 (Rio de Janeiro: MEC, 1977), p. 20; E.L.Powe, *Capoeira & Congo* (Madison, WI: Dan Aiki Publications, 2002) p. 30.
- 47 See Carneiro, *Negros bantos*, p. 149; R.Landes, *City of Women* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 102, Tavares, ‘Capoeira mata um!’, p. 14; Vianna, *Quintal de Nagô*, p. 9. Rego, *Capoeira Angola*, p. 87 affirms categorically that he never saw a *ganzá* (*reco-reco*) been played in a capoeira roda. Written evidence on the use of these instruments and the absence of the *atabaque* is confirmed by oral history: M.Ferreirinha, Interview, 5.9.1994; M.Waldemar, Interview by L.R.Vieira, 1989; and recognized by capoeira scholars such as F.Abreu and B.Almeida (Mestre Accordeon), *Á gua de beber, camará! Um Bate-papo de Capoeira* (Salvador: Empresa Gráfica da Bahia, 1999), p. 78.

- 48 Bola Sete, *Capoeira Angola*, p. 69; Pires, *Escritos*, Chapter IV, p. 129, and Chapter V, footnote 118; M. Sodré Santugri. *Histórias de mandinga e capoeiragem* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1988), p. 16.
- 49 M.João Pequeno, Interview, 7.2.1995.
- 50 CD Pastinha (Re-edition *Praticando Capoeira*), track 4, 3:27.
- 51 Vianna, *Quintal de Nagô*, pp. 8–9.
- 52 Ott, *Formação*, p. 153, for instance affirms ‘Seldom did the game become a physical fight, and when it happened, they used wooden machetes’.
- 53 Idem, and J.Amado, *Bahia de todos os santos* (27th edn, Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1977), pp. 239–40.
- 54 For a complete list of toques played by eight different *mestres*, see Rego, *Capoeira Angola*, pp. 59–62.
- 55 When Kay Shaffer, in the 1970s, asked the same old *mestres* to play the rhythms from the list each of them had provided to Waldeloir Rego in the 1960s, he discovered that some of them had since changed their mind, and provided him with different lists or played them differently. See K.Shaffer, *O Berimbau-de barriga e seus toques* (Rio de Janeiro: FUNARTE, 1977), pp. 41–2, and also Rego, *Capoeira Angola*, pp. 62–4.
- 56 Coutinho, *O ABC*, p. 48. The literal translation of these games is, in the same order, ‘Inner Game’, ‘Great’ and ‘Small Saint Benedict’, ‘Break me with people, monkey’, ‘Samba from Angola’, ‘Pick up the orange from the ground’, ‘This black is the devil’.
- 57 Carneiro, *Negros bantos*, p. 149.
- 58 Coutinho, *O ABC*, p. 46.
- 59 The first known recording was made by Lorento D.Turner in 1940. Other available early recordings are the LPs by M.Bimba, Caiçara, Canjiquinha, Cobrinha Verde, Pastinha, Traíra, and Waldemar.
- 60 Rego, *Capoeira Angola*, p. 89.
- 61 For a more detailed discussion of each genre, see G.Downey, ‘Incorporating Capoeira: Phenomenology of a Movement Discipline’ (PhD Thesis, University of Chicago, 1998), pp. 123–35; J.L.Lewis, *Ring of Liberation. Deceptive Discourse in Brazilian Capoeira* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 162–87.
- 62 Downey, ‘Incorporating Capoeira’, p. 124.
- 63 See CD *Essência. O berimbau e a voz do eterno Bimba* (Salvador: Fundação Mestre Bimba, 2001), tracks 1–2.
- 64 Lewis, *Ring of Liberation*, pp. 169–72.
- 65 Lewis, *Ring of Liberation*, p. 217.
- 66 Idem, pp. 12, 120–7, 195–202.
- 67 Idem, p. 217.
- 68 M.Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual. Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. xv, 7–10.
- 69 T.J.Desch-Obi, ‘Combat and the Crossing of the *Kalunga*’, in L.M.Haywood (ed.), *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 358, 364.
- 70 L.R.Vieira, *O jogo de capoeira. Cultura popular no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Sprint, 1995), pp. 104, 121–4.
- 71 Coutinho, *O ABC*, p. 78, Note 8; Rego, *Capoeira Angola*, pp. 38–42.
- 72 R.Lody, *Tem dendê, tem axê. Etnografia do dendezeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 1992). As with many other ‘traditional’ capoeira songs, it is difficult to date this song and it might be of more recent origins.
- 73 Pinto, *Capoeira*, pp. 189–90; C.T.Tavares, ‘Capoeira mata um!’; E.L.Powe, *Capoeira & Congo*, pp. 12, 30.
- 74 Compare the discussion in Rego, *Capoeira Angola*, p. 74, who relies for this point mainly on the work of the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz.
- 75 See the description by O.da C.Eduardo, *The Negro in Northern Brazil. A Study in Acculturation* (2nd edn, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1966), p. 61.
- 76 Lewis, *Ring of Liberation*, p. 232; Rego, *Capoeira Angola*, p. 148. For a discussion of the ‘transe capoeirano’ from a medical point of view, see A.Decanio, ‘Transe Capoeirano. Estado de consciência modificado na Capoeira’, *Revista da Bahia*, 33 (July 2001), special issue ‘Capoeira. Ginástica da resistência’, pp. 42–65.
- 77 Ott, *Formação*, p. 157.
- 78 C.T.Tavares, ‘Capoeira mata um!’, p. 14.

- 79 Carneiro, *Negros bantos*, pp. 150, 155. Some practitioners today still insist on the formal similarities between capoeira and candomblé. G.dos S.Barbosa, for instance, highlights the similarity between 'Iê', the 'Angola cry' at the beginning of a capoeira song and Ogun's war scream, as it is performed in *candomblé* ritual. See 'Capoeira de Angola. A Personal View of a Capoeira Master', *The World of Music*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1988), p. 83.
- 80 R.Landes, *City of Women* (2nd edn, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), pp. 92, 100.
- 81 M.dos Santos (ed.), *Capoeira e Mandingas: Cobrinha Verde* (Salvador: A Rasteira, 1991), p. 33.
- 82 Powe, *Capoeira & Congo*, p. 48.
- 83 C.Tavares, 'Capoeira mata um!', p. 10.
- 84 L.da Câmara Cascudo, *Dicionário de folclore brasileiro* (3rd edn, Rio de Janeiro: Editora Tecnoprint-Ediouro, 1972), p. 19; Lewis, *Ring of Liberation*, p. 23.
- 85 Some authors derive mandinga from Central African amulets called *masalu ma- (e) dinga*. N.Lopes, *Dicionário banto do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Prefeitura da Cidade, n.d.), p. 159.
- 86 In that meaning it has acquired core significance in contemporary Angola practice, where it helps to differentiate angoleiro kinesthetics from the Olympic gymnastics style movements of mainstream capoeira.
- 87 Compare the amulets with Solomon and David stars from nineteenth-century Rio reproduced in M.C.Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 225.
- 88 Coutinho, *O ABC*, p. 78.
- 89 Santos, *Capoeiras e Mandingas*, pp. 17–18.
- 90 Interview with M.João Pequeno by L.R.Vieira, 1989.
- 91 Quoted in L.R.Vieira, *O jogo de capoeira. Culturapopular no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Sprint, 1995), p. 99.
- 92 For handclapping in capoeira in the 1940s, see Almeida, 'O brinquedo', and the picture of Pastinha's group in Chapter 6.
- 93 Bola Sete, *Capoeira Angola*, p. 98.
- 94 M.S.de Carvalho Franco, *Homens livres na ordem escravocrata*. (São Paulo: Ática, 1974) remains the classical essay on this topic.
- 95 H.Koster, *Travels in Brazil* (London: Longman, 1817), Vol. I, pp. 397–8.
- 96 Interview, Salvador, 9 February 1995.
- 97 *Estado da Bahia*, 11 February 1933.
- 98 Pires, 'Escritos', Chapter IV.
- 99 M.dos Santos, *Capoeira e Mandingas*, p. 12; Interview with M.Boca Rica, 5 February 2001.
- 100 The Dictionary *Aurélio* registers 125 synonyms for the noun and adjective *valentão*, which reflects the widespread use of the term in different contexts.
- 101 *Diário de Notícias*, 3.3.1916.
- 102 Coutinho, *O ABC*, p. 24. For another version see Rego, *Capoeira Angola*, p. 122, No. 126. Pedro Mineiro also enjoyed the protection of the ex-governor J.J.Seabra. See Moura, *Mestre Bimba*, p. 60.
- 103 Coutinho, *O ABC*, p. 41.
- 104 L.Pires, 'Escritos', Chapter IV, p. 102 concludes that gangs existed in Salvador at a 'embryonic stage, less organized than in Rio de Janeiro'.
- 105 Coutinho, *O ABC*, p. 31.
- 106 Coutinho, *O ABC*, p. 30.
- 107 A.Lühning, ' "Acabe com este santo, Pedrito vem aí..." Mito e realidade da perseguição policial ao candomblé baiano entre 1920 e 1942, *Revista USP*, Vol. 28 (1995–6), pp. 194–220.
- 108 Repression against *candomblé* in this period also left few traces in the criminal records. In his research Júlio Braga only localized two cases leading to a court case (*Na Gamela*, pp. 22, 125).
- 109 Coutinho, *O ABC*, pp. 24, 61.
- 110 Vianna, *Quintal de Nagô*, pp. 43–6. Note that Vianna uses the term *valentões* here for the students, not for the *capoeiras*!
- 111 Landes, *City of Women*, pp. 103, 92.



- 112 L.Lope (see [Figure 4.10](#))s, *Rio Vermelho e suas tradições; memórias* (Salvador: Fundação Cultural do Estado da Bahia, 1984), p. 51.
- 113 'Olhe o home que eu matei. Na cadeia eu não vou'. Mestre Waldemar, CD *Capoeira* (São Paulo: Sonopress-Rimo, n.d.), track no. 4.
- 114 Only J.Moniz claims to have seen Besouro playing with famous capoeiras such as Doze Homens in Santo Amaro. See 'De Wildberger a "Besouro"', *A Tarde* (Salvador), 5 and 7 May 1949 as reproduced in Moura, *Capoeiragem-Arte*, pp. 59–60.
- 115 A number of episodes are told by A.Félix, *Bahia, prá começo de conversa* (Salvador: n.p., 1982), pp. 91–2.
- 116 A.L.C.S.Pires, 'Apresentação do processo de Manoel Henrique Pereira, vulgo Besouro de Mangangá, *Camarada Capoeira*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (2000), pp. 24–6; for a full account see Pires, 'Escritos', Chapter 4, pp. 131–4.
- 117 Interview with M.João Pequeno, 9 February 1995; Santos, *Capoeira e Mandingas*, p. 12.
- 118 *Diário de Notícias*, 22 January 1909.
- 119 Interview with M.Caiçara, 22 August 1994.
- 120 Coutinho, *O ABC*, p. 36.
- 121 Coutinho, *O ABC*, pp. 65–6.
- 122 For a discussion of the construction of the *capoeira* as the paradigmatic *malandro*, see Downey, 'Incorporating Capoeira', pp. 197–203.
- 123 This concept was developed by J.C.Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
- 124 Sodré, *Mestre Bimba*, p. 49.

## 5

### Mestre Bimba and the development of 'Regional style'

- 1 H.L.Gates Jr and K.C.C.Dalton, 'Introduction' to *Josephine Baker and La Revue Nègre: Paul Coliris Lithographs of Le Tumulte Noir in Paris, 1827* (New York: H.N.Abrams, 1997).
- 2 D.Levinson and K.Christensen (eds), *Encyclopaedia of World Sport. From Ancient Times to the Present* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 1996), pp. 148, 225.
- 3 A.Dolin, *Kempo. Die Kunst des Kampfes. Ostasiatische Kampfsportarten* (Frechen: Komet, n.d.), p. 318.
- 4 Levinson and Christensen, *Encyclopaedia*, p. 537.
- 5 See A.L.C.Simões Pires, 'Escritos sobre a cultura afro-brasileira. A formação histórica da capoeira contemporânea, 1890–1950' (PhD thesis in History, UNICAMP, Campinas, 2001), p. 54; L.R.Vieira, *O jogo de capoeira. Corpo e cultura popular no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Sprint, 1995), p. 154.
- 6 See the caricatures from April 1908 reproduced in J.Moura, 'A projeção do negro Ciríaco no âmbito da capoeiragem', *Revista Capoeira. Arte e Luta Brasileira*, Vol. 2, No. 11 (n.d.), pp. 47–8.
- 7 Neither the contemporary newspapers reproduced by Moura nor the early report by A.Burlamaqui, *Ginástica Nacional (Capoeiragem) metodizada e regrada* (Rio de Janeiro: n.e., 1928), p. 25, do notice the spit or sand version. To my knowledge, the spit version, with racist undertones, was first released by I.P.Marinho, *Subsídios para o estudo da metodologia do treinamento da capoeiragem* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1945), p. 85.
- 8 W.Rego, *Capoeira Angola. Ensaio sócio-etnográfico* (Salvador: Itapuã, 1968), p. 263; J.Moura, 'Evolução, apogeu e declínio da capoeiragem no Rio de Janeiro', *Cadernos Rioarte*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1985), p. 93; Moura, 'A projeção', pp. 46–7.
- 9 Vieira, *O jogo*, p. 155.
- 10 R.C.Alves de Almeida (M.Itapoan), *A saga do Mestre Bimba* (Salvador: Ginga Associação de Capoeira, 1994), p. 21.
- 11 Frederico José de Abreu, 'Bimba é bamba'. *A capoeira no ringue* (Salvador: Instituto Jair Moura, 1999), p. 49.
- 12 G.Wang, 'The History of Gracie Jiu-Jitsu', <http://www.fortunecity.com/olympia/bannister/8/maeda.html> (accessed on 20/05/02).
- 13 Burlamaqui, *Ginástica*, p. 14.

- 14 It seems, however, that Burlamaqui knew the work of OCD, an army officer who had published a pamphlet as early as 1905, where he already proposed the transformation of capoeira into a national gymnastics. See O.D.C., *Guia do capoeira ou ginástica brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: 1907; republished by the Associação de Capoeira Barravento, Niterói, RJ).
- 15 Burlamaqui, *Ginástica*, pp. 22–3.
- 16 <http://rohermann.tripod.com> (accessed 11/02/02).
- 17 Pires, *Escritos*, p. 59.
- 18 Marinho, *Subsídios*, pp. 29–30.
- 19 J.Moura, *Mestre Bimba. A crônica da capoeiragem* (Salvador: author's edition, 1991), p. 24
- 20 A.A.Decânio Filho, *A herança do Mestre Bimba* (Salvador: author's edition, 1996), p. 73. The same episode is also told for Bimba's father.
- 21 M.Itapoan, *A saga*, p. 17. Moura, *Mestre Bimba*, p. 12 however claims that the club was only founded in 1930.
- 22 Vingativa, banda traçada, balão em pé, balão arqueado, balão colar de força, cintura desprezada, cintura de rins, gravata cinturada, tesoura aberta, benção, solta pescoço, sopapo galopante, godeme, cotovelo and dentinho. See A Tarde, 16 March 1936, as quoted in Abreu, *Bimba é bamba*, p. 68. As this author points out, *martelo* and *queixada*—today considered hallmarks of Regional style—are still missing from the list.
- 23 Rego, *Capoeira angola*, p. 33. For further statements by Bimba on this point see L.V.de Sousa Reis, *O mundo de pernas para o ar. A capoeira no Brasil* (São Paulo: Publishers Brasil, 1997), p. 133.
- 24 B.Almeida (M.Acordeon), *Capoeira. A Brazilian Art Form. History, Philosophy, and Practice* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1986), p. 115.
- 25 Moura, *Mestre Bimba*, p. 25.
- 26 Itapoan, *A saga*, p. 93; Itapoan quoted in Vieira, *O jogo*, p. 154.
- 27 A.L.Lacé Lopes, *A Volta do Mundo da Capoeira* (Rio de Janeiro: Coregráfica, 1999), pp. 349–54. Other students of Bimba, emphatically assert that Bimba did use movements from *ju-jitsu*. This information was provided by M.Umoi (Lisbon).
- 28 In a previous fight in the Brotas stadium Bimba had already defeated another challenger. See Abreu, *Bimba é bamba*, p. 53.
- 29 According to Edison Carneiro, *Negros bantos* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização brasileira, 1937), p. 159, these matches enjoyed 'enormous success' in terms of ticket sales.
- 30 Quoted in Abreu, *Bimba é bamba*, p. 65
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- 34 Pires, *Escritos*, pp. 147–8; Abreu, *Bimba é bamba*, p. 95.
- 35 Lacé Lopes, *A Volta do Mundo*, pp. 354–7; <http://openlink.br.inter.net/rohermann/>.
- 36 See *Revista Recôncavo* (Salvador), January 1953, p. 20.
- 37 See *Tribuna da Bahia* from 18.11.1972 as quoted by Abreu, '*Bimba é bamba*', p. 34. Mestre Decânio (A herança, pp. 152, 247) asserts that Bimba's 'teaching system and method' was already stabilized when he started training with the creator of the Regional [in 1938].
- 38 G.Downey, 'Incorporating Capoeira: Phenomenology of a Movement Discipline' (PhD thesis, Anthropology, University of Chicago, 1998), pp. 226–8. In 1967 Bimba asserted that the main movements he had introduced into Regional were the *banda traçada*, *baú*, *cruzo de carreiro*, *encruzilhada*, *salto mortal* and *ponteira* (quoted in Abreu, '*Bimba é bamba*', p. 28).
- 39 See illustrations 10–12 in the leaflet accompanying the LP recording *Curso de Capoeira Regional* (n.d.); See also Itapoan, *A saga*, p. 91; Acordeon, *Capoeira*, p. 115, describes it as 'a sequence of acrobatic throws trained recklessly without spotting to help the students lose their fear of falling'. A. A.Decânio Filho, *Falando em capoeira* (Salvador: author's edition, 1996, p. 27) asserts the balões were inspired by Greco-Roman wrestling. See also Downey, 'Incorporating', p. 230.

- 40 See the film 'Vadiação', director Alexandre Robatto, 1952; and the discussion in K.K.Bonates, *Iúna Mandingueira, a ave símbolo da capoeira* (Manaus: Fenix, 1999), p. 54.
- 41 Abreu, *Bimba é Bamba*, p. 40.
- 42 Itapoan, *A saga*, pp. 61–2, M.Acordeon, *Capoeira*, p. 113.
- 43 For a good description, see Acordeon, *Capoeira*, p. 118.
- 44 This comparison is explicitly made by B.Almeida (M.Acordeon), *Água de beber, Camará. Um bate-papo de capoeira* (Salvador: UCA, 1996), p. 50, and M.Itapoan, *A saga*, p. 84.
- 45 Downey, 'Incorporating', p. 227; Itapoan, *A saga*, pp. 83–5.
- 46 Itapoan, *A saga*, pp. 73–7; Vieira, *O jogo*, pp. 156.
- 47 Vieira, *O jogo*, pp. 144–71.
- 48 Rego, *Capoeira angola*, p. 59; also listen to Bimba's LP.
- 49 See the extensive discussion in Bonates, *Iúna Mandingueira*, pp. 51–6.
- 50 In 1936, for instance, Bimba's group performed on the Municipal Square with 2 *berimbaus*, 3 *pandeiros* and 1 *ganzá*. Abreu, *Bimba é bamba*, pp. 30–1.
- 51 Decânio, *A herança*, pp. 169–70.
- 52 See the verses reproduced in Moura, *Mestre Bimba*, pp. 72–7, and comments by Downey, 'Incorporating', pp. 137–8.
- 53 Itapoan, *A saga*, pp. 79–80; M.Sodré, *Mestre Bimba: corpo de mandinga* (Rio de Janeiro: Manati, 2002), p. 78. Acordeon, *Água de beber*, p. 50 explains that the toque 'Panha Laranja no Chão, Tico-Tico' was only played to announce the end of the sequences training and the beginning of the game within the academy.
- 54 The best information on this aspect of Bimba's life is given by Sodre, *Mestre Bimba*, pp. 92–7.
- 55 See the *samba-de-roda* recordings on the LP by Mestre Bimba e coro, *Le-le ô a turma de Bimba chegou*. (Salvador: Liceu de Artes e Ofícios da Bahia, 1991).
- 56 Itapoan, *A saga*, p. 63.
- 57 Vieira, *O jogo*, p. 161.
- 58 Silk scarves were traditionally used to protect the shirt from dirt and sweat in the neck area.
- 59 M.Camisa Roxa asserts that Bimba abolished the 'take away the medal' test (*arranca-medalha*) because it often had resulted in accidents. Interview in *Roda de Capoeira. A revista do capoeiro*, No. 1 (July 1998), p. 7.
- 60 For the graduation ceremony, see Rego, *Capoeira Angola*, pp. 286–7, Itapoan, *A saga*, pp. 67–72, Decânio, *A herança*, pp. 166–7, Vieira, *O jogo*, pp. 159–61.
- 61 For a reproduction of the symbol see Itapoan, *A saga*, p. 104 or the CD *Essência. O berimbau e a voz do eterno Bimba* (Salvador, Fundação Mestre Bimba, 2001).
- 62 Decânio, *A herança*, pp. 105–7.
- 63 For a list of names see Moura, *Mestre Bimba*, pp. 26, 29.
- 64 Abreu, *Bimba é bamba*, p. 25.
- 65 I have not been able to find solid evidence for the date of that meeting. There is also some divergence regarding the whole episode. According to Decânio, *A herança*, p. 107, Cisanando Lima, a personal friend of Magalhães, made the initial contact. M.Sodré, *Mestre Bimba*, p. 93, suggests that links were established through the world of *candomblé* (Magalhães used to consult and protect the priest Bernardino from the Bate-Folha shrine). M.Itapoan, however, told me that this rather happened through one of the Interventor's body guards, also from Ceará (interview with M.Itapoan, 27.1.1997).
- 66 Rego, who knew Bimba well and often interviewed him, gives a full account in *Capoeira angola*, p. 315 and includes the text of a letter by Magalhães confirming the exhibition at the palace.
- 67 Vieira, *O jogo*, p. 171.
- 68 Rego, *Capoeira*, pp. 282–3.
- 69 Itapoan, *A saga*, p. 44. Many books or journals reproduce pictures of that meeting. See for instance the photo of Bimba with Vargas, the governor of Bahia and the mayor of Salvador in *Revista Grupo Muzenza* 01, n.d., p. 5; or C.Barbieri, *Um jeito brasileiro de aprender a ser* (Brasília: DEFER/GDF, 1993), p. 136.
- 70 Decânio, *A herança*, p. 106.

- 71 See Abreu (*Bimba é bamba*, p. 36) for a reproduction of the original article. I quote here the English translation made by M.Acordeon (*Capoeira*, p. 33). Decânio (*A herança*, pp. 64–6) maintains that the police sergeant Lúcio Barra Preta had lost money betting on one of Bimba's opponents in a previous pricing match and for that reason was keen to have a go at the *mestre*.
- 72 Abreu, '*Bimba é bamba*', pp. 22, 30.
- 73 Decânio, *A herança*, p. 151.
- 74 Acordeon, *Capoeira*, p. 71 and *Água de beber*, p. 55; see also Muniz, *Mestre Bimba*, p. 71.
- 75 Information provided by M.Itapoan and M.Nenel.
- 76 Interview with Jair Moura, Salvador, 14 February 2001.
- 77 *O Momento* (Salvador), 25.3.1946, p. 1. I am grateful to Frede Abreu for providing me with this reference.
- 78 Interview with Jair Moura, Salvador, 14.2.2001.
- 79 Decânio, *A herança*, p. 117; see also N.Capoeira, *Capoeira. Os fundamentos da malícia* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1992), pp. 77–9.
- 80 *A Tarde*, 23.3.1962.
- 81 Written accounts do not agree on how the emblem was designed. See Decânio, *A herança*, pp. 41–4; Itapoan, *A saga*, p. 104; and Sodré, *Mestre Bimba*, p. 58.
- 82 According to Decânio, *Falando*, p. 26 it was Carlos Senna who suggested the 'Salve'.
- 83 Rego, *Capoeira*, p. 283.
- 84 M.Itapoan (ed.), *Mestre 'Atenilo': o 'relâmpago' da capoeira regional* (Salvador: author's edition, 1991), pp. 40–2.
- 85 This account merges two different versions of the event. Interviews with Mestre Caiçara, Salvador, 9.8.1994 and 22.8.1994.
- 86 For more details on the last years of his life, see Pires, *Escritos*, pp. 154–8.
- 87 Both quoted in Rego, *Capoeira angola*, p. 269.
- 88 *Incorporating Capoeira*, p. 230–1. Abreu, '*Bimba é bamba*', p. 23, writes in a similar vein: 'Por ser um preto inventor não contou com a simpatia de alguns influentes intelectuais baianos estudiosos da cultura negra, avessos aos novos inventos culturais dos negros'.
- 89 Lopes, *A volta do mundo*, pp. 62, 109.
- 90 R. Ortiz, *A morte branca do feiticeiro negro* (Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 1978).
- 91 A.Frigério, 'Capoeira: de arte negra a esporte branco', *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, Vol. 4, No. 10 (1989), pp. 85–98.
- 92 Pires, *Escritos*, p. 151.
- 93 Vieira, *O jogo*, pp. 131, 145, 158.
- 94 Reis, *O mundo*, pp. 27–8.
- 95 See in that respect the absolutely correct appreciation by M.Acordeon, *Água de beber*, p. 54, and Downey, 'Incorporating', *passim*.
- 96 The names of some capoeira *toques* such as São Bento Grande ou Angola em Gêgy [Jeje] clearly reflect that pattern. See LP Sílvia Acarajé, *Capoeira primitiva. Toques inéditos* (São Bernardo do Campo: Universal Comercial Fonográfica/Caritas, 1993).
- 97 See Downey, 'Incorporating', pp. 242–4.
- 98 Abreu, *Bimba é bamba*, p. 39.
- 99 Itapoan, *A saga*, p. 65.
- 100 Vieira, *O jogo*, p. 145; see also p. 158.
- 101 Vieira, *O jogo*, pp. 162–7.
- 102 See M.Acordeon and Pires, 'Escritos', p. 151.
- 103 For a similar appreciation see M.Itapoan, *A saga*, p. 18.
- 104 Downey, 'Incorporating', p. 240.
- 105 Abreu, '*Bimba é bamba*', p. 37; Sodré, *Mestre Bimba*, p. 100.
- 106 This convincing argument was first made by Abreu, '*Bimba é bamba*', pp. 25, 41.

107 Quoted in Abreu, *'Bimba é bamba'*, p. 34.

## 6

### Mestre Pastinha and the codification of Angola style

- 1 W.Freitas Oliveira and V.da Costa Lima, *Cartas de Edison Carneiro a Artur Ramos: de 4 de janeiro de 1936 a 6 de dezembro 1938* (São Paulo: Corrupio, 1987), p. 98.
- 2 Oliveira and Lima, *Cartas*, p. 93; A.L.C.Simões Pires, 'Escritos sobre a cultura afro-brasileira. A formação histórica da capoeira contemporânea, 1890–1950' (PhD thesis, UNICAMP, Campinas, 2001), p. 195.
- 3 Letter of 12.12.1936 to Artur Ramos, in Oliveira and Lima, *Cartas*, p. 131.
- 4 See also Pires, 'Escritos', pp. 196–7. The newspaper *A Tarde* claimed in his edition from 23.3.1962 to have organized a capoeira exhibition for his founder as early as 1927.
- 5 L.Bradley, *Bass Culture. When Reggae Was King* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 65.
- 6 *Correio da Bahia*, 15.4.2001, p. 6. There is some confusion regarding the name of Pastinha's mother. Liberac, *Escritos*, p. 158, asserts that her name was Raimunda dos Santos, and reports that M.Alfinete (Gildo Lemos), a student of M.Pastinha, affirms that the *mestre's* real mother was Eugência Maricá de Carvalho.
- 7 See preface by J.B.Colmenero in M.Pastinha, *Capoeira Angola* (3rd edn, Salvador: Fundação Cultural do Estado da Bahia, 1988); *Tribuna da Bahia*, Salvador, 14.11.1981.
- 8 K.Shaffer, *O Berimbau-de-barriga e seus toques* (Funarte, 1977), p. 37. In at least one interview Pastinha suggested that he learned from several teachers: 'Mestres I had many, the old Africans that taught me [...]'. *O Estado de São Paulo*, 16.11.1969.
- 9 This information is provided by Edward Powe who interviewed M.Pastinha in the 1960s. See *Capoeira and Congo* (Madison, WI: Dan Aiki Publications, 2002), p. 30.
- 10 In an interview Pastinha suggested that Benedito was already 'over 60' when he met him, and that he only taught him for four months. *A Tarde*, 22.02.1966.
- 11 *Folha da Tarde*, 21.8.1959; *O Cruzeiro*, 4.5.1963; *A Tarde*, 22.2.1966; Decânio, *A herança*, p. 45.
- 12 L.V.de Sousa Reis, *O mundo de pernas para o ar. A capoeira no Brasil* (São Paulo: Publishers Brasil, 1997), p. 139.
- 13 *Realidade*, February 1967, p. 81.
- 14 Testimony reproduced on the CD *Mestre Pastinha*, re-issued by the magazine *Praticando Capoeira*, n.d., track 5.
- 15 Idem, tracks 3, 4; see also *O Estado de São Paulo*, 16.11.1969.
- 16 M.Bola Sete, *A Capoeira Angola na Bahia* (2nd edn, Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 1997), p. 31.
- 17 See A.Decânio, *A herança de Pastinha. A metafísica da capoeira. Comentários de trechos selecionados do mestre* (Salvador: author's edition, 1996), p. 44.
- 18 Reis, *O mundo*, p. 139; M.Bola Sete, *Capoeira*, p. 33; Carmen Vasconcelos, 'Diário de um mestre', *Correio da Bahia*, 1.10.2000, p. 12.
- 19 Edison Carneiro wrote to Artur Ramos already in 1936: 'Capoeira, here, is also called *capoeira de Angola*' (Oliveira and Lima, *Cartas*, p. 89).
- 20 Coutinho, *Manuscritos*, p. 17; see also Pires, 'Escritos', p. 163.
- 21 *Manuscritos e desenhos de Mestre Pastinha* (A.Decânio, ed., Salvador, n.d.), pp. 3–4.
- 22 D.Coutinho, *O Abc da Capoeira Angola: os manuscritos do mestre Noronha* (Brasília: DEFER, 1993), p. 72.
- 23 Coutinho, *O Abc*, p. 32.
- 24 Interview with João Pequeno, Salvador, 7.2.1995.
- 25 Pastinha, V.Ferreira, *Manuscritos* (1996), p. 4b.
- 26 This was for instance the case of Bimba (Decânio, *A herança*, p. 45). But even angoleiros such as Cobrinha Verde claimed they never heard of Pastinha before 1941 and cast doubt on Aberrê being his student. See M.dos Santos, *Capoeira e Mandingas: Cobrinha Verde* (Salvador: A Rasteira, 1991), p. 18.
- 27 Pires, 'Escritos', p. 164.
- 28 Bola Sete, *Capoeira Angola*, p. 28; A.Félix, *Bahia, prá começo de conversa* (Salvador: author's edition, 1982).

- 29 *Estatuto do Centro Esportivo de Capoeira Angola*, Chapter I, Art. 1.
- 30 Decânio, *A herança*, p. v.
- 31 M.Pastinha, *Capoeira Angola* (3rd edn, Salvador: Fundação Cultural do Estado da Bahia, 1988), p. 19.
- 32 M.Pastinha, *Manuscritos*, p. 10b; Decânio, *A herança*, p. 37.
- 33 M.Pastinha, *Manuscritos*, p. 8a-b, Decânio, *A herança*, p. 32.
- 34 M.Pastinha, *Capoeira Angola*, p. 23; *Manuscritos*, p. 21b, Decânio, *A herança*, p. 55.
- 35 See the list in *Manuscritos*, p. 12a; Decânio, *A herança*, p. 42.
- 36 *Manuscritos*, p. 12b; Decânio, *A herança*, p. 43.
- 37 *Manuscritos*, p. 9a, Decânio, *A herança*, pp. 32–3.
- 38 *Manuscritos*, p. 7a-b; Decânio, *A herança*, pp. 25–7.
- 39 *Manuscritos*, p. 4b, Decânio, *A herança*, p. 19.
- 40 *Manuscritos*, p. 10b, 11a; Decânio, *A herança*, pp. 37–8.
- 41 ‘Como eu penso. Reflexões do Mestre Pastinha’ (F.Abreu and G.Downey, eds, mimeo, 1994), pp. 11, 13.
- 42 *Realidade*, February 1967, p. 82.
- 43 *Correio da Bahia*, 1.10.2001.
- 44 *Manuscritos*, p. 7b, Decânio, *A herança*, p. 28.
- 45 *Manuscritos*, 17a, Decânio, *A herança*, p. 49.
- 46 *Manuscritos*, 9b-10a, Decânio, *A herança*, p. 35.
- 47 Interview with João Grande, Berlin, 5.7.2002, *Folha da Tarde*, 21.8.1959.
- 48 K.Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1998), pp. 191, 218.
- 49 E.Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia* (Rio de Janeiro: Ediouro, n.d.), p. 44; Butler, *Freedoms Given*, p. 208.
- 50 *Manuscritos*, p. 13b.
- 51 Decânio, *A herança*, p. 44.
- 52 *Manuscritos*, p. 11a.
- 53 *Realidade*, February 1967, p. 79.
- 54 *Manuscritos*, p. 7b.
- 55 *O Globo*, 14.11.1981.
- 56 *Manuscritos*, p. 14a.
- 57 M.Pastinha, *Capoeira Angola*, pp. 30, 45.
- 58 In his *Manuscritos*, p. 12a, Pastinha gives a long list of movements not allowed for demonstrations. According to M.Cobra Mansa, however, M.Pastinha did use *balões* in demonstrations (personal communication, 26.11.2002).
- 59 See the illuminating discussion in G.Downey, ‘Incorporating Capoeira. Phenomenology of a Movement Discipline’ (PhD thesis, Chicago, 1998), pp. 129, 137.
- 60 *Diário de Notícias*, 15.4.1959; G.dos Santos Barbosa, ‘Capueira de Angola. A Personal View of a Capueira Master’, *The World of Music*, Vol. 30, No. 2, p. 79; B.Almeida, *Á gua de Beber, Camará!* (Salvador: author’s edition, 1999), p. 77.
- 61 M.Pastinha, *Capoeira Angola*, p. 31.
- 62 *Manuscritos*, p. 2b (see also p. 10b).
- 63 *A Tarde*, 22.2.1966.
- 64 For a detailed account see Pires, ‘Escritos’, Chapter VII, pp. 188–92.
- 65 J.Amado, *Bahia de todos os santos* (27th edn, Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1977), p. 274.
- 66 Interview with M.Caiçara, Salvador, 9.8.1994.
- 67 M.João Grande for instance only started to train regularly with Pastinha once the academy was set up at Pelourinho, interview, Berlin, 5.7.2002.
- 68 J.Amado, *Bahia de Todos os Santos* (12th edn, São Paulo: Martins, 1966), p. 207–9; W.Rego, *Capoeira Angola* (Salvador: Itapuã, 1968), pp. 287–90; *A Gazeta*, 25.8.1962; Interview with João Pequeno, Salvador, 7.2.1995.
- 69 ‘Como eu penso. Reflexões do M.Pastinha’ (F.Abreu and G.Downey, eds, mimeo, 1994), p. 19.
- 70 *Diário Popular*, SP 16.11.1969.
- 71 Interview with M.Boca Rica, Salvador, 5.2.2001.

- 72 *Diário de Notícias*, 25.6.1961.
- 73 *Boletim da Casa da Bahia* (RJ), April–May, 1959.
- 74 M.Pastinha, *Capoeira Angola* (3rd edn, Salvador: Fundação Cultural do Estado da Bahia, 1988), p. 20.
- 75 L.R.Vilhena, *Projeto e missão. O movimento folclórico brasileiro, 1947–1964* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 1977).
- 76 *O Globo*, 11.4.1976.
- 77 *Correio Paulistano*, 13.10.1955.
- 78 *O Estado de São Paulo*, 2.11.1956.
- 79 *Jornal do Brasil*, 13.7.1956; *Tribuna da Imprensa*, 23.7.1956.
- 80 *Diário de Notícias*, 15.4.1959; *Jornal do Brasil*, 15.4.1959; *Correio da Manhã*, 3.5.1959.
- 81 *O Diário*, 19.9.1964.
- 82 Interview with João Grande, Berlin, 5.7.2002.
- 83 The capoeiristas João Grande, Gildo Alfinete, Camafeu de Oxossi, Gato Preto, and Roberto Satanás accompanied M.Pastinha.
- 84 *A Tarde*, 29.4.1966; Reis, *O mundo*, p. 146.
- 85 Interview with João Grande, Berlin, 5.7.2002.
- 86 Information from Pastinha's last years can be gathered in *O Globo*, 11.4.1976; *A Tarde*, *Tribuna da Bahia*, *Correio da Bahia*, *Jornal da Bahia*, *Jornal do Brasil*, *O Globo*, all from 14.11.1981. See also Reis, *O mundo*, pp. 146–7.
- 87 Downey, 'Incorporating', p. 86.
- 88 Decânio, *A herança*, p. 23.
- 89 *Correio da Bahia*, 1.10.2000.
- 90 See the picture with both *mestres* and the organizers in A.A.Couto (M.Zoião), *Abrace esta causa! História, arte e filosofia da capoeira nacional* (Salvador: author's edition, 1999), p. 14.
- 91 Pires, *Escritos*, pp. 175–8.
- 92 Interview with M.Gigante, Salvador, 15.2.2001.
- 93 *O Globo*, 12.12.1966.
- 94 He asserted 'that I am not a man who wants to be defeated by age, and I maintain my condition' (*Manuscritos*, p. 2a).
- 95 I am grateful to Daniel Dawson for having drawn my attention to this aspect in our conversations at the FICA encounter in Virginia, July 2002.
- 96 *Jornal do Brasil*, 14.11.1981.
- 97 *O Globo*, 11.4.1976.

## 7

**Contemporary capoeira, 1950–2004**

- 1 Talk by M.Nestor Capoeira, Capoeira Meeting Hamburg, 26.7.2001. M.Nestor interviewed Madame Sata in the 1960s.
- 2 This article was reprinted by the *Estado da Bahia*, but has disappeared from the public library in Salvador. A summary can be found in A.L.Cardoso Simões Pires, 'Escritos sobre a cultura afro-brasileira. A formação histórica da capoeira contemporânea, 1890–1950' (PhD thesis in History, UNICAMP, Campinas, 2001), pp. 65–7.
- 3 'A Arte dos "Moleques de Sinhá"', *Flan*, 31.5.1953. See also Pires, 'Escritos', pp. 71–72.
- 4 A.L.Lacé Lopes, *A volta do mundo da capoeira* (Rio de Janeiro: Coregráfica, 1999), p. 88. See also M.A.Borges Salvadori, 'Capoeiras e malandros: pedaços de uma sonora tradição popular (1890–1950)', (PhD thesis, UNICAMP, Campinas, 1997).
- 5 Quoted in Pires, 'Escritos', p. 69.
- 6 Pires, 'Escritos', p. 69.



- 7 Lopes, *A volta do mundo*, p. 50. Short biographies, interviews and photos can be found in 'Mestre Artur Emídio, a lenda viva da capoeira', *Revista Capoeira*, No. 1, pp. 14–17; and 'Artur Emídio, um mito que há 63 anos dedica a vida à capoeira', *Praticando Capoeira*, No. 7, pp. 44–7.
- 8 F.Albuquerque (M.Gato), 'Personalidades da capoeira moderna', *Universo Capoeira*, No. 5 (1999), p. 7.
- 9 *Jornal do Brasil*, 22.12.1963; *Pulso*, 2.11.1963.
- 10 M.Gato, e-mail, March 2003.
- 11 L.Pereira da Costa, *Capoeiragem. A arte da defesa pessoal brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: n.p., 1961) and *Capoeira sem mestre* (Rio de Janeiro: Edições de Ouro, n.d.).
- 12 *Jornal do Brasil*, 22.12.1963; *Correio da Manhã*, 18.10.1964; *Jornal do Comércio*, 27.2.1966; Lopes, *A volta do mundo*, p. 50; B.Almeida, *Capoeira, A Brazilian Art Form. History, Philosophy, and Practice* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1986), pp. 95–107.
- 13 My account of the Caxias *roda* is based on interviews with M.Cobra Mansa, 28.11.2002, and M. Russo, 16 May 2003. See also the rather incomplete account published in *Revista Capoeira*, Vol. I, No. 3 (1998), pp. 12–13.
- 14 M.Cobra Mansa, e-mail, 25.03.2003; M.Marrom, personal communication.
- 15 Not to be confused with the Group headed by M.Sombra in Santos, also called Senzala.
- 16 Nestor Capoeira, *Capoeira. Os fundamentos da malícia* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1992), pp. 92–3.
- 17 *Revista Capoeira*, Vol. II, No. 10, p. 12.
- 18 Quoted in Capoeira, *Os fundamentos*, p. 97.
- 19 M.Cobra Mansa, e-mail, 25.03.2003.
- 20 M.Gato, e-mail, March 2003.
- 21 M.Gato, e-mail, March 2003.
- 22 Lopes, *A volta do mundo*, pp. 68–9.
- 23 Talk by M.Nestor Capoeira, Capoeira Meeting Hamburg, 26.7.2001.
- 24 For an autobiography of M.Camisa, see [www.abadacapoeira.com.br/mestre.html](http://www.abadacapoeira.com.br/mestre.html)
- 25 'São Paulo. Meio século de capoeira', *Revista Capoeira*, No. 3, pp. 22–5.
- 26 A.L.L.Lopes, *A capoeiragem no Rio de Janeiro. Primeiro ensaio: Sinhozinho e Rudolf Hermann* (Rio de Janeiro: author's edition, 2002), pp. 165, 171–88.
- 27 [www.capoeiradobrasil.com.br/historia5.htm](http://www.capoeiradobrasil.com.br/historia5.htm)
- 28 A.das Areias, *O que é capoeira* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1984), pp. 73–4.
- 29 *Revista Capoeira*, Vol. I, No. 2, pp. 12–15.
- 30 Interview with M.Brasília, 7 March 2001.
- 31 *Praticando Capoeira*, No. 5, p. 11.
- 32 *Universo Capoeira*, No. 5 (1999), p. 19.
- 33 Interview with M.Ousado, 27.5.2001.
- 34 For a complete list, see *Revista Capoeira*, Vol. I, No. 4, p. 24.
- 35 Reis, *O mundo*, p. 165.
- 36 Interview with M.Brasília, *Revista Capoeira*, Vol. I, No. 4, p. 27.
- 37 Interview with M.Ousado, 27.5.2001.
- 38 A.Areias, *O que é capoeira*, p. 75.
- 39 *Jornal do Brasil*, 22.12.1962.
- 40 *Jornal do Brasil*, 28.8.1968.
- 41 Almeida, *Capoeira*, p. 51.
- 42 Almeida, *Capoeira*, p. 52.
- 43 See for instance those adopted by the Federação Bahiana de Pugilismo, Departamento de Capoeira (Salvador, 1976).
- 44 Reis, *O mundo*, p. 174.
- 45 The comments on the competitions are based on an interview with M.Ousado, 27.5.2001.
- 46 Reis, *O mundo*, p. 173.
- 47 A.Areias, *O que é capoeira*, p. 79.

- 48 Reis, *O mundo*, pp. 176–7. My account of the Captains is based on her excellent analysis.
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### Conclusion: The contemporary meanings of capoeira

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